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"GLAD TER SEE YOU, BRUIN, MY BOY," HE SAID. "HEV YE TAKEN GOOD KEER OF
YER YOUNG MISTRESS WHILE I'VE BEEN GONE?"

Old Pegs, the Mountaineer;

OR,

THE TRAPPER RIVALS.

BY LEWIS W. CARSON.

CHAPTER I.

OLD PEGS.

HUSH! Is that a footstep coming up the canyon? It came nearer and nearer, and a man of strange appearance suddenly stepped into view, rounding a bend in the canyon. At the first glance it seemed that he was a dwarf in stature, but as he advanced it was plainly to be seen that this was a mistake, for those broad shoulders and herculean arms never belonged to a dwarf. In height he would scarcely have reached five feet, but his girth of shoulder and hip was something wonderful. In short, he had the body of a giant, set upon a pair of legs so crooked and misshapen that it seemed as if he had borrowed those limbs from some one else.

He came on with a peculiar, sidelong, hitching gait, swinging out his left leg and throwing forward the shoulder upon that side in an irresistibly ludicrous way, but getting over the ground at a very fair pace.

His dress was that of the mountainman, of greasy buckskin, yet showing the careful hand of woman in the manner in which it was made. He wore fringed leggins, moccasins of ponderous size, and a high bearskin cap, which added considerably to his ludicrous "make-up." His weapons were a carefully-polished rifle, a pair of splendid revolvers, a knife and a hatchet.

His face was broad, ruddy and good-natured, fringed by a russet-brown hair and beard, slightly sprinkled with gray. A single look at the high forehead, merry brown eyes and smiling mouth, about which a whimsical look would linger in spite of himself, showed that he was a merry, reckless soul, but a man of undaunted courage.

"Hyar we come and hyar we go, pegging along the canyon," he half-sung. "Thar was some mistake in my make-up I reckon, or I'd be a different man. But who keers, ez long ez I am happy ez a buck Digger in grasshopper time? Oh, Lordy, yes."

He stopped and cast a penetrating glance about him, at the same time dropping one leg a little, showing that it was shorter than the other by some two inches. He seemed to listen, and his leonine head was thrown to one side in an attitude of profound attention. The next moment, by a movement of wonderful rapidity, he threw himself out of sight into one of the crevices with which the ravine abounded, and dropping to the earth behind a boulder, awaited the event.

To the casual observer there had been no break in the usual sounds in mountain and forest, but a moment more showed that the wanderer was not at fault, for the sound of hoofs could be plainly heard coming up from the east. Nearer and nearer they came, and the rapidity of the hoof-beats showed that the horseman, whoever

he might be, was coming at the top of his speed; and directly the head of a horse appeared, and a single rider came thundering down the pass, half-lying on the animal's back, and urging him on with knife and spur, while behind him sounded other hoof-beats, showing that he was pursued.

It was a white man, and that was enough for the old hunter, who started out from his place of concealment and checked the flying steed.

"Hi, thar, stranger—what's up?"

The rider reined in his furious horse and grasped a weapon, but, seeing that it was a white man who barred the way, dropped his hand and answered, hurriedly:

"Indians!"

"After you?"

"Looks like it, ole man."

"Get down quick, then—take yer weepens, and send the hoss on. You've got ter lose him, or yer sculp."

The man did not hesitate, but flung himself from the saddle and scored his knife-point sharply across the flank of the horse, which fled on lightly, being freed from its rider, and without a word the hunter led the way into the crevice which he had just left.

The horse had just made the last turn in the canyon when about twenty of those Arabs of the plains, the Blackfeet, suddenly came in view, their mustangs scrambling like cats along the bed of the canyon, and the riders, bending forward like huntsmen in the chase, urging them on by word and blow. They passed like a whirlwind, and were gone; then the hunter bounded to his feet.

"Thar they go, the painted reptiles, like bed-bugs armed fur war! Come on, stranger; the quicker we git up these yer' rocks the better."

"I am a poor footpad," said the stranger with a light laugh; "but lead the way, old True Blue, and I'll follow. That was a close shave, I tell you."

"Clust enuff fur comfort," replied the hunter. "This-a-way."

He began to climb the rugged side of the ravine with the agility of a cat, swinging his huge body from ledge to ledge by the power of his gigantic arms, and then turning to assist his companion, who, although younger, was by no means so agile.

At last they reached the top of the ledge, fifty feet above the canyon bottom.

"Down—fur yer life—down!" hissed the hunter, as they reached the top of the ledge.

Both men fell prostrate, and not a moment too soon, for the Indians were coming back at a flying gallop, leading among them the horse which had so lately been abandoned by the rescued man. They came to a halt directly beneath the ledge, sitting erect and grim upon their panting mustangs, without uttering a word.

No body of men on earth can present a more warlike appearance than the Blackfeet—a nation brave even to desperation. Their bronzed bodies, shimmering ornaments and flaunting feathers; their long lances glittering in the sun; the ease and grace with which they sat their horses, as if horse and man were one piece, combined to make the appearance of this body at once imposing and threatening.

The chief was a man of gigantic size, armed with lance, hatchet, knife and a sort of mace—which he carried slung at the pommel of his high Mexican saddle, with which he rode. He spoke, and at the sound of his sonorous voice the hunter started, for he knew the voice well. It was that of Whirlwind, a chief who had made himself a terror throughout that region, and the deadly enemy of white men, under all circumstances.

"Let the braves scatter and search the canyon," cried Whirlwind. "The white dog has leaped from his saddle and is hidden among the rocks like a rabbit. We must have his scalp, for he has killed Flying Cloud, the son of Natal—Nemissa. Can we return to the Blackfoot lodges with empty hands?"

The majority of the warriors, leaving their horses in charge of the rest, sprung down and began the search, but the feet of their flying steeds had obliterated all signs of a trail, had there been one, and the place where the white men had ascended was a rock which would not leave the mark of a foot.

The old hunter was lying on the earth, literally convulsed with laughter at the manner in which he had outwitted Whirlwind, an enemy to the death, when, turning his eyes upon the man he had saved, he saw him in the act of thrusting forward the rifle with the intention of killing the chief.

Rolling over quickly, the hunter grasped the rifle, and after a struggle succeeded in tearing the weapon from the young man's grasp.

In doing so, however, a small piece of rock was detached and fell over the cliff upon the head of an Indian below, who was knocked senseless by the blow.

The chief started and cast a quick glance upward, but at this moment, the hunter while holding his companion down, managed to give an exact counterfeit of the bleat of a Bighorn. So perfect was the imitation that the chief at once concluded that the Bighorn in moving about had knocked down the stone upon the head of the stricken warrior, and seeing that his men were puzzled, he called them in and they moved up the pass together, searching every crevice for the man who had escaped them.

When the sound of hoofs came faintly back from the upper part of the ravine, the hunter released his companion and stood up, while the other bounded to his feet flushed and excited.

"It is a good thing for you that you have just saved my life, old man, or we should quarrel. What did you mean by stopping me when I was going to shoot that old thief, Whirlwind?"

"Look yer', young 'un," demanded the hunter. "d'ye know who I am?"

"No."

"Mebbe you don't want to."

"Of course I wish to know the name of the man who has just saved my life; but let me warn you never to attempt again what you did just now."

"You'd mount me ez a spider mounts a fly, I s'pose?" said the hunter, coolly. "My young fr'end, never let yer angry passhins git the best ov you, and by all means never hop on a man untel you ar' tollable sart'in you kin lick

him. I don't want to put you in mind ov the fac' thet I hev just saved yer life—I'd do that ag'in, anyway—but what was you going ter do ef you hed killed Whirlwind?"

"There would have been one less scoundrel on the face of the earth."

"Sart'in—I agree; but, look yer', lad, kin we two lick nineteen Blackfeet?"

"I don't suppose we could."

"No, sir-ree! I've fou't Injuns ever sence I was knee-high to a grasshopper, and I want ter hev it sot down thet an Injun in his own kentry and well fixed, is an or'nary and orkard cuss to manige—he is, by thunder!"

"But they could not get at us here—"

"I s'pose not. An Injun can't climb ez well ez the next man, I s'pose. Now did ye ever hear tell ov Old Pegs?"

The young man started and looked at him keenly.

"Old Pegs, the guide—Old Pegs, the hunter, Old Pegs, the Indian terror? I should think so!"

"Them's my handles, stranger. I'm Old Pegs."

"I beg your pardon for saying what I did then, for I have no desire to quarrel with a man of your reputation. Perhaps it is for the best that Whirlwind should escape at this time, but my hour will come, and when it does, let him beware of me!"

"All hunky; rub him out the fu'st chainece you git. Now, what's *your* handle, young man?"

"People who know me well call me Rafe Norris."

"I don't keer what people *call* you. Is Rafe Norris yer handle?"

"Yes."

"What's yer biz?"

"I can't tell you that just now, my good friend. I—"

He did not finish the sentence, for Old Pegs caught him by the shoulders and flung him heavily to the ground, falling beside him from the impetus of his own exertions. The hand of the old guide was outstretched, and catching up a heavy stone he flung it with deadly aim at the feathered head of an Indian which at this moment rose above the ledge and who was poising a lance for a throw. Straight between the eyes the heavy stone struck, and spreading his arms abroad, the Indian plunged headforemost into the depths below, where his skull was shattered out of the semblance of humanity upon the rocks. So quickly was it done that Rafe Norris had no idea why he had been so rudely assailed, and seizing upon Old Pegs, was about to pommel him.

"See yer', my boy," said Old Pegs, "what's the matter with you?"

"What did you pitch into me for?" hissed Rafe, in an angry tone.

"Come hyar, you fool, ef I must say it," replied Old Pegs. "Creep to the edge of the cliff and look over."

Considerably awed by the manner of the hunter, Rafe crawled to the edge of the cliff, and looking down cautiously saw the dead form of the savage below, while the rattle of hoofs told that some of the Indian's comrades were coming

back to look for him. The unfortunate savage, suspecting something wrong and desirous of distinguishing himself, had come back to search again for Rafe Norris, and hearing voices, had scaled the cliff unheard just in time to meet his fate.

"Come along," whispered Old Pegs. "Show a leg and foller me."

CHAPTER II.

OLD PEGS'S TREASURE.

THE country through which Old Pegs led his new friend was one of the most difficult and dangerous in the portion of the foothills in which they were placed. They passed through defile after defile, clambered over ridges and forded mountain streams in which the trout were so abundant that their feet touched them as they passed.

On the march, Old Pegs had a chance to observe his companion closely, and he did so without allowing him to think that he was watched. Rafe might have been thirty years of age, of an erect, stately figure, with very black hair and eyes. His hair was suffered to grow long, and curled slightly at the ends; he wore a heavy mustache—the point dropping nearly to his collar as he stood erect—and a long imperial. His eyes were of that vivid black so seldom seen, and looked wicked and bold. Although in mountain garb, there was a sort of dandyism even in this dress which did not strike old Pegs favorably.

"I don't know whether I'm doing the right thing in showing you this road," said the hunter. "I'm a plain man and in a humble station, and I've got a treasure to guard."

"A treasure?"

"You bet!"

"Have you found a gold-mine?"

"No; gold ain't no use ter me."

"It cannot be diamonds?"

"Better'n diamonds, young'un; better'n gold; better'n beaver, even."

"What can you be talking of?" said Rafe, impatiently.

"Never you mind about that. I know what I'm talking about, and when I get home I'll show you my treasure."

At a turn in the path they were traversing they came suddenly upon a huge bear, which reared upon its haunches and sat, in a silly way, looking at them, with its tongue hanging out. Rafe Norris, who had no love for close companionship with a grizzly, dropped his rifle into the hollow of his hand, and was about to fire, when Old Pegs struck up the weapon.

"Don't shoot that b'ar, confound you!" he cried. "He's mine."

"A pet bear! Is that your treasure, then?"

"Not a bit of it," replied Old Pegs.

"Bruin! Bruin!" cried a clear, sweet voice. "Come here, sir!"

Down dropped the bear upon all-fours, and waddled away in the direction of the voice, while Rafe stopped and looked at Old Pegs in amazement.

"That is your treasure, eh?" he demanded. "I thought you were too old a man to care for a woman."

"I'm a nice figger fur a lady's man, ain't I?"

replied the hunter, scornfully. "I orter hit you, but I guess I won't. Here we ar'."

The path led out of the narrow ravine through a thicket, and they entered a small, sheltered valley, containing hardly an acre of bottom-land, a sort of oasis scooped out by the hand of nature from the bosom of the eternal hills. There was no sign of human habitation anywhere, but their ears were saluted by a burst of song and the tinkle of a guitar. The voice of the singer was so wonderfully pure, rich and sweet that Rafe stopped in utter amazement and looked at Old Pegs.

"What does this mean, old man?" he cried; "that is not the voice of an Indian woman."

"Ska'cely; oh, no—I reckon not. And see yer', feller—the gal is under my pertection, and the man thet lays a finger on her, or insults her by look or word, may git out the papers fur his funeral. D'ye understand?"

"Why should I try to harm her?" said Rafe. "Hush! let us hear her song."

The voice rung out full and clear, not a note was slurred or hurried, and the two stood spell-bound until she had finished, when Old Pegs called out: "Myrtle!"

The sound of the guitar was hushed; there came the rush of flying feet, and the singer appeared and flung her arms about the neck of the old man and kissed him.

"I am glad you have come, father, for I was getting lonely. You—"

She paused suddenly, for her eyes just then rested upon the face of Rafe Norris, who was gazing at her with a look of undisguised admiration. What did he see? A fair young creature in the flush of early womanhood, with a face and form which might have driven a painter mad. She was slightly framed, but every line was in perfect symmetry, and her face was perfection itself. A touch of peach-bloom in either cheek, ripe-red lips and lustrous brown eyes; short, ambrosial locks, clinging about a neck which rivaled in whiteness the snows of the mountain, and a look of perfect innocence beautifying all.

Why did Rafe Norris gaze at her as if he had seen a vision from the grave?

"Don't be skeered, little'un," said Old Pegs. "This yer' is Rafe Norris, a gentleman thet run from some cussid Blackfeet and got away. I brung him here fur the night, and expect you to treat him well. This is my darter, Rafe—I kain't mister any one, ye know—and she's the best and pootiest gal in the kentry."

Rafe Norris bowed low, and uttered a well-framed compliment, which the girl received coldly.

"It is somewhat strange, Mr. Norris, that you should be alone here," she said.

"I was separated from my party," he answered, blandly, "and the Indians set upon me before I was aware. I would accept the danger gladly for the honor of this introduction."

"Draw it kinder mild, Rafe—kinder mild," said Old Pegs. "We raally can't stand too many nice speeches out hyar."

"That speech came from my heart," replied Rafe. "I hope that the lady will not consider it an unmeaning compliment."

"That'll do," said Old Pegs, dryly. "Now,

Myrtle, gal, will you git us suthing to eat? Ez fur me, I'm pesky hungry. What hev you got fur us?"

"I caught some trout awhile ago, and have them ready to broil," replied Myrtle.

"I cannot consent to allow Miss Myrtle to perform such menial service for me," said Rafe. "Let me do the cooking, for which such hands were never intended."

Myrtle broke into a merry laugh. "You betray yourself, Mr. Norris," she said. "You are a gentleman born and bred, for none of our own mountaineers would object to my cooking a meal for them."

He looked a little vexed, and she glided away, and Old Pegs sat down on a great rock and signed to his companion to do the same.

"Let me go and assist Miss Myrtle," said Norris. "It really pains me to suffer her to do such work."

"Sit down, stranger," said Old Pegs, shortly. "I won't hev any one, I don't keer who he is, try ter make the gal discontented with her life hyar. She's the darter of a mount'in man, and ef she ever marries—which I hope she won't—she'll be the wife of a mount'in man; thet's ez good ez swore to."

"I hope you do not doubt me, Mr.—"

"Old Pegs! Thet's my name—Old Pegs. I don't want no other handle, and I won't hev it. Ye'r' a stranger, and so we won't have any familiarity till I know you."

"You are particular, sir," replied Norris, knitting his brows. "It is sad that I did not bring my pedigree with me when I came here."

"Don't be ridiculous, stranger," replied Old Pegs, "or we may part company afore you know it. I won't have no foolishness about hyar ef I know myself; no discount on thet ar'."

"I beg your pardon again, but really, you are very hard on me. I claim to be a gentieman, and hope I am so. Perhaps that would make me lose your good opinion."

"Oh, no; I've knowed lots of *gentlemen* thet was bully boys, and many's the high old time I've had with 'em, right about hyar. But, they *was* gentlemen, and I *knowed* it. Now, I don't know anything about you."

"I hope you will know me better some time," replied Rafe, in such a peculiar tone that Old Pegs looked up at him quickly, as if to detect the lurking menace in his face. But that face expressed nothing except polite desire to make friends, and the old hunter dropped his eyes again and whistled. A lumbering tread was heard; the pet bear appeared and came rolling up at that peculiar gait so common to his race, and placing his head upon the ground, turned a sort of somerset, erected himself upon his hind feet, and came forward, extending his paw, which Old Pegs shook heartily.

"Glad ter see you, Bruin, my boy," he said. "Hev ye taken good keer of yer young mistress while I've been gone?"

The bear nodded in a singularly grotesque manner, and Rafe could not repress a laugh.

"You have trained that fellow well, old man," he said. "I suppose he will obey you in anything now?"

"Ef you was to lay a finger on me and he thought you was in 'arnest, it would take a hull

brigade to gather yer fragments from the a'jacent kountry round abowt."

"I'll be 'keerful' how I handle you, then," said Rafe. "Did I understand you to say that Miss Myrtle is really *your* daughter?"

"Ain't noways anxious ter know, be you, stranger?" said Old Pegs, frowning. "Git up hyur, Bruin—stand on yer he'd!"

The grizzly at once threw his quarters into the air, and in that attitude walked up to his master, remained in that position until ordered to come down, which he did at once, and rolled himself rapidly over and over until he was quite out of sight behind the bushes.

"You dislike to talk about your daughter, I see," said Rafe, persistently.

"No, I don't—no sech thing," replied Old Pegs, belligerently. "Don't tell me no sech foolishness. She's a good gal, but she ain't fur gentlemen to consort with, mind you. And look yer: ef you kain't manige ter git 'long 'thout making yourself too familiar, then all I kin say is, we'd better part kump'ny now."

What Rafe might have said in reply it is impossible to say, but at this moment Myrtle appeared and called to them. Old Pegs arose in his slow and easy manner, and led the way through a screen of thick bushes until they came upon a cabin so artistically concealed that a person might have passed it a hundred times without suspecting its presence. It was built of small logs, dovetailed at the corners in frontier fashion, and chinked with a sort of blue clay. It had two small windows, each containing four panes of glass—for that article was difficult to transport to the mountain region. The door was heavy and swung upon iron hinges, manufactured from strap iron, in a rude way.

The interior of the little place was as neat as hands could make it, and the little table and stools actually shone with scrubbing. A guitar stood in a little curtained recess, and, to the utter surprise of Rafe Norris, a rude bookcase in one corner contained a supply of books which had evidently been much used. The table was set in the middle of the room, the plain crockery arranged to the best advantage. They had venison steaks, fresh broiled trout, pone bread and fragrant coffee. Norris at the invitation of Old Pegs drew up his stool and was helped liberally. Myrtle poured the coffee, and all enjoyed a hearty meal.

"Thar," said Old Pegs, "I dunno ez I keer fur any more. What a thing it is to hev a gal like Myrtle ter make the little cabin bright! She killed that deer and caught them trout herself, and thet's what I call being ginerally useful. What do you say?"

"I can appreciate the home qualities of your daughter," said Rafe, "but from the appearance of that bookcase and the guitar I should say that she has other good qualities."

"And so she bez, Rafe—so she bez. She kin sing like a bird—kin Myrtle—and when the old man comes home tired from the hunt, mebbe she don't make his life pleasant by singing and reading. She's a master reader—is Myrtle."

"I should think that it would be hard to find a teacher in this section, but from the quantity of the books which I see she must be considerably advanced."

Old Pegs, the Mountaineer.

"Oh, she's got a teacher," replied Old Pegs, with a sly look at Myrtle, whose cheek flushed like the rose. "A mighty good teacher, I mou't say."

"I was about to offer my poor services in that capacity," said Rafe, "and I am sorry to hear that I am in some degree forestalled."

"Ye'r' cut out intirely," replied Old Pegs. "The gal won't take to no other teacher ez she does to this one."

"Where is this wonderful teacher, now, if I may ask?" said Rafe, with a look of annoyance.

"Gone down ter the fort, I reckon. It's about time fur a lesson, too, and I kin see thet the gal is getting anxious."

"Father!" cried Myrtle.

"Thet is gospel truth, gal," replied Old Pegs, with a grin. "I kin see it in yer eye whenever I look at you."

Just then the bear, which had been lying upon the threshold, raised his muzzle and snuffed the air in a peculiar manner, and then rising heavily, started away on an awkward shambling trot in the direction of the entrance to the valley.

"The critter smells su'thing," said Old Pegs, drawing his rifle nearer, "and I'll take a walk outside and see what's up."

He started out quickly, leaving Rafe Norris with Myrtle. He at once began to improve the opportunity.

"It seems strange to me that a lady to all appearance so refined as you are should pass her life in the midst of this desolation."

"I am not 'a lady' and I am far from refined, Mr. Norris. Is it lady-like to go out and shoot a deer, bring home steaks and saddle, and catch and cook a mess of trout? I am very much afraid that you are mistaken in me, and think me one of those white-handed misses who since along the streets of Leavenworth and St. Joseph; but I am not."

"You belie yourself in this, Miss Myrtle. While you stay here of course you must conform to the usages of the society in which you live. But you are fitted to adorn—"

She lifted her finger in a playful manner.

"No nice speeches, if you please, Mr. Norris, for I am not used to them, and should not know how to appreciate them in the least. I am afraid your intercourse with the fine ladies who dwell in cities, has unfitted you for the realities of life as we find them in the mountains."

"I pray not, for I hope to win your good opinion some day, and to be able to prove to you that such ladies are not to my taste. I admire your spirit—"

"I think we had bet'er change the conversation as I am not egotistical enough to wish to talk of myself, and nothing else. Perhaps you play the guitar."

"A little," he replied, "but I am not going to expose myself by trying to play now. I heard your music as I came up and was literally enthralled by it."

She brought the guitar, and began to clear away the table while he touched the keys and strings lightly, bringing the instrument into tune, while he kept his eyes upon her steadily. Once or twice she met his eyes and was startled

by the bold look of admiration in them. He continued to drum upon the strings, merely striking chords and watching her intently. He seemed about to speak, but at this moment the sound of voices could be heard and Old Pegs, accompanied by a young man in a tasteful hunting garb, entered the room. Myrtle sprung forward with a glad cry and gave him both hands while giving him a welcome.

"Is that her teacher, I wonder?" muttered Rafe, below his breath. "We shall see. I will not be foiled when the prize for which I play is almost in my grasp."

CHATER III.

DAVE FARRELL—BRUI NSCOUTING.

THE young man who had entered was the *beau ideal* of a Western scout, and Rafe was obliged to confess that he would have made a hard customer to meet in the midst of a border struggle. About five feet and ten inches in height, straight as a cedar, with curling brown hair, and eyes of the same color, a brown but well-cut face, firm lips and white teeth; dressed as a leader of scouts in the neat fringed hunting-shirt belted at the waist, high horseman's boots and sombrero; and armed with the rifle, two first-class revolvers and a heavy knife. He carried a bundle in one hand which he dropped to meet the extended hands of Myrtle, and stood there with a smile upon his handsome face.

"Rafe Norris," said Old Pegs, "this hyar chap is Dave Farrell, a real out and outer, at present captain of a trapping brigade of the Northwest Company. Ef you meet any one thet asks you, be keerful to tell 'em thet Old Pegs sez he's a roarer!"

Dave Farrell turned to acknowledge the introduction with a peculiar look upon his face.

"It seems to me, although I may be wrong—that I have seen you before."

"I don't remember, Captain Farrell," replied Rafe, coolly. "Still, I've been in many places, and we might have met without recollecting it."

"I think it was in Fort Garry, in the year '53."

"Scarcely: I have not been in that country for nearly four years."

"We are all liable to mistakes," said Dave; "but of course you have some kind of business up this way?"

"Of course."

"Do you object to mentioning *what* business?"

"I am not in a position to give you any information upon the subject just now as I do not recognize your authority. I have been chased by Indians and escaped by means of your friend here, who has offered me a shelter and has not insulted me by asking impertinent questions."

"Impertinent!" said Dave, slowly, turning his eyes full upon the face of the speaker. "I said that I would like to know your business, having stated mine."

"And I tell you that I am not in a condition to gratify your curiosity in the least."

"Let's have no quarreling hyar, boys," said Old Pegs. "Mr. Norris goes away to-morrow to find his party, and thet's the end of it. Let's treat him like a gentleman while he stays."

"I have no more to say at present," said

Dave. "If I had thought my simple question would be regarded as an insult I should not have asked it."

"You are excused," said Rafe, coolly, "but I don't allow any man to interfere with my affairs."

Dave said no more, but dropping upon one knee began to undo the bundle which he had dropped, and Myrtle clapped her hands joyfully as he displayed a number of well-selected books and literary papers. The two were soon occupied over them to the utter exclusion of the rest.

"Oh, let up, Dave," said Old Pegs; "drop them cussid books and talk to us. What did you hear new at the fort?"

"I heard that the Hudson Bay are going to trap on our side this year, in spite of our men."

"Hey! Now it looks like our boys will let 'em, don't it?"

"They are not the kind of men easily trodden underfoot, as you know well," replied Dave, grimly. "I've fought the Hudson Bay for ten years and I'm not going to be driven out of my way by them now."

"I've heard that the Hudson Bay was very strong this year in the number of their men," said Rafe Norris.

"Seissors!" roared Old Pegs. "You don't s'pose we keer fur thet, do you? Hark; what's thet?"

They heard a fierce growl from the bear, and then a cry of mortal agony. The three men grasped their weapons, and darting away in the direction of the sound, found the bear locked in a close grapple with an Indian, while another was running rapidly across the opening.

"Spies!" cried Old Pegs, pointing after the flying man. "Stop him, Dave!"

Dave Farrell brought his rifle to his shoulder, and fired, apparently without aim. The flying savage paused suddenly, made a leap into the air and fell upon his face.

"Euchered!" said Old Pegs, quietly. "I don't want no Injins in my camp, you bet! Let's look arter this chap Bruin bez harnessed."

The teeth of the bear were fastened in the shoulder of the Indian with whom he struggled, and his claws were tearing him limb from limb. Old Pegs caught the brute by the neck, and by the exercise of all his muscular power, coupled with a loud command, managed to separate the two, and the Indian, a horrible object to look at, sunk back upon the sod, bleeding at every vein.

Old Pegs stooped to raise him, but at this moment his eyes opened and rested upon the face of Rafe Norris, who had followed the rest. A look of recognition passed over his face, and he seemed about to speak, when Norris drew a pistol and shot him through the heart as coolly as if he had been a dying brute.

"It is better to put him out of his misery," he said, quietly; "and, as you say, it won't do to have spies about us."

"That was a coward shot," cried Dave, angrily. "How dare you kill a wounded man before us?"

"My young friend," replied Rafe, in his smooth tone, "don't let us make any mistakes or have a quarrel out here, for I am quick on the trigger and *might* shoot."

"Our boys don't scare very easy," was the answer, "and are always ready to take and give. If you are inclined that way, I don't know but it is just as well to humor you."

"Hold on, boys," cried Old Pegs. "I take a hand in this game, myself. The fu'st man that lifts a weepion bez got ter stand a shot from me."

"I will not be bullied by any man alive," cried Rafe Norris. "If I shot this savage, it was only to put him out of pain, for any man can see that he would have been dead in five minutes."

"Mou't be you are right, Rafe," replied Old Pegs; "but, why didn't you let him die the nat'ral way? It almost seemed to me thet the cuss know'd you, and was going ter speak."

"Pshaw; what will you suspect next, I wonder? I never saw the fellow in my life."

"I ain't going to conterdict you, Rafe, acause it won't pay, ez I hain't got no proof. Howsumever, thar lies the critter with a bullet in the heart, and he's rubbed out, easy. But, what I want ter know is this: what is this yer' *Modoc Sioux* doing in this kentry?"

"Modoc Sioux!" cried Dave, looking more closely at the dead savage. "You are right, old man, and it is a surprise to see a party of that trike in the heart of the Blackfoot country."

Rafe Norris started; an angry look came into his face, for he thought he saw suspicion in the eyes of the two men. That branch of the great Sioux nation known as the Modoc Sioux were notorious for their hostility to the whites, and their country was far away.

"Let's look at the other chap," said Old Pegs.

They hurried to the side of the Indian who had been so suddenly stricken by the fatal bullet of Dave Farrell, and turned him over. Both the mountaineers started as they recognized "Half-breed Jack," a man who was known far and wide as one of the most trusted employees of the Hudson Bay Company—a villain who was capable of any crime.

"Now this begins to look like business," said Dave. "Old Pegs, you and I must talk this matter over alone."

"Why alone, my mountain hero?" demanded Rafe, in a bantering tone. "Am I to understand that you do not consider me a trustworthy person?"

"We never trust strangers with our business," replied Dave. "You do not seem in the least surprised to see Half-breed Jack lying here."

"Half-breed Jack, eh? And who, pray, is Half-breed Jack?"

"If you don't know now, you never will," was the ambiguous reply. "Here, old man, let's you and I have a talk."

"I see that you are disposed to set my friends against me," said Rafe, angrily. "Beware, young man! I am one who never forgets or forgives an injury, and one day I may take occasion to remind you of this one."

"All right; you will be kind enough to leave us alone now?"

Rafe stood for full two minutes looking with a dark scowl into the face of the young captain of the "Trapping Brigade," and then, turning on his heel, he walked toward the cabin, his heart torn by contending passions. Old Pegs and Dave remained over the body of the half-breed, looking very ill at ease.

"This man is not to be trusted," said Dave, quickly. "I cannot place him, but I am certain that I have seen him under circumstances of peculiar significance. I cannot for my life remember anything except the place, and that was Fort Garry."

"He mou't hev been thar jest ez you were, Dave. Beavers and bufflers! you don't go back on a man acause he's bin in Fort Garry, does you?"

"I'll wager my existence that he is a bad man," replied Dave, hotly, "and one day you will find that I am right. Why should the Modoc Sioux be here? Don't you know that no man on earth has as much influence among them as Half-breed Jack?"

"Thet don't hurt Rafe Norris, my boy."

"But that Indian he killed knew him, I am almost willing to swear; and, God forgive me if I do him wrong, but I think he killed him fearing that the Sioux might say something to betray him."

"I had the same thort in my mind, Dave, I allow," said Old Pegs. "Now, what do you perpose to do?"

"I'm going to put a spy on him when he leaves this place that will trail him through to Oregon but he'll find out who he is."

"Agreed, Dave; but don't r'ile up at the man acause he's taken a fancy ter my little gal. I see whar the harness is tight onto you, but, buttermilk and molasses! you don't think I'd give my gal ter sech ez him?"

"It would have been better if you had let the Indians have their way anyhow. You've broken with Whirlwind—a man who is capable of doing you a great deal of harm—for the sake of a man you don't know."

"Whirlwind never see'd me at all, Dave. But, look yer'; I never thort I'd hear Dave Farrell tork in thet way abowt saving a feller white man's life."

"I was wrong, and I beg your pardon," said Dave. "Perhaps I am unreasonably jealous, but I thought that Myrtle looked with some favor upon him. If I thought so—"

"You'd raise Kain, wouldn't you? Now don't be an idjot, Dave, acause I kain't stand it. Let's plant these chunks of cussidness som'ers, and git 'em out of the way."

It did not take long by means of a shovel which Old Pegs brought out of the copse, to dig a shallow grave, in which they la'd the two Indians, piling a heap of stones upon the bodies to guard them from the wolves. This done, they went back to the cabin, where they found Myrtle and Rafe Norris seated rather close together, while he was explaining a book which Dave had brought. If the young captain had a fault it was jealousy, and the blood started into his face as he noted the position of the pair. Deeply interested as she was in the explanation, in her eager desire for knowledge, Myrtle did not look up as they came in, and even her father looked a little vexed, for he did not like to see her becoming interested in Rafe Norris.

"Oh, Dave!" she cried, looking up at last. "You would be interested in the account which Mr. Norris is giving of the Aleutian islands. He was there on a voyage not long ago."

"I fear Mr. Farrell does not appreciate my

poor endeavors to entertain you, Miss Myrtle," said Rafe, who interpreted rightly the expression of David Farrell's face. "But, if you have no objections, we will go on."

"I reckon we'd better postpone the study, jest now," said Old Pegs. "Dave hez a good 'eal to tell you about his visit to civilization, Myrtle."

"By no means," replied Dave, taking up his weapons. "While Miss Myrtle is so pleasantly engaged, I can not find it in my heart to interfere."

With these words he hurried out of the cabin before Myrtle could stop him, and Old Pegs started up to follow. When he reached the door, Dave was half-way across the opening, moving on at the long, swinging pace into which a man insensibly falls, who is used to long marches over the prairie. The old hunter hurried after him, calling him by name.

"Let him go, the jealous boor," said Rafe, quickly. "We can dispense with his company easily enough."

"Mr. Norris," said Myrtle, flushing, "you forget yourself when you call my friends hard names. I am very sorry for what has happened, for no one can be better, braver or more true hearted than the man you call a boor."

"I beg your pardon," said Norris in a tone of contrition. "The word slipped out before I had time to think, for of course it would be ungentlemanly in me to thus stigmatize a friend of yours. Let us go back to our book."

"I am tired of it now," she replied, pushing it aside. "Let me alone, sir; how dare you touch my hand."

"Unintentional, upon my honor, Miss Myrtle. Surely you do not propose to follow our sulky young friend and beg him to come back?"

"I ought to do so, but I fear that I am not brave enough, sir. All that I am, as far as education goes, he made me. He has ridden many miles through a hostile country to bring me these books, and now I have driven him away when night is coming on."

"Let me replace him," he said. "Such beauty as yours need not go begging, and you will do well to trust me; better than you think, if you knew all."

She brushed by him angrily, and made for the door, but he caught her by the wrist to detain her.

"Release me, sir!" she cried, the blood mounting into her cheek. "You insult me."

"I think I am going mad indeed," he replied in a hoarse, strained voice, dropping her hand. "I can not bear to have you leave me for his sake. I have never yielded so completely to woman's witchery in an hour, and I am thus bold in speaking to you, because I may never have the opportunity. I love you as well as if I had known you for years, and you must listen to me."

"You are perfectly in the right, Mr. Norris, in saying that you are mad, for nothing else could prompt you to speak in this manner. Let me hear no more of it—I beg."

"I do not ask you to love me, now," he replied earnestly. "Give me a chance; let me show you what I will do for the woman I love; that is all I ask."

"I shall not notice this foolishness upon your part, by telling my father what you have said, sir, for I would not answer for what he would do. But, let me hear no more of it, I beg you. Hush, father is coming back."

He sunk back on a stool, his face absolutely ghastly with intense passion, and the door was flung open and Old Pegs hurried in alone.

"Don't say any thing to me, Myrtle, fur I ain't in good humor," he said in an almost angry tone. "I never thought you a flirt before, but ef you drive away Dave Farrell, you drive away the best man in the mount'ins, that's all I've got to say."

"Has he gone?" she said anxiously.

"He's out thar in the pass. And stranger, I warn you to keep out of his way, because he ain't in a heavenly temper. Hark!"

Swift steps were heard, the door was flung open, and Dave rushed into the room, pale and nearly breathless with a long arrow sticking in his shoulder. "Indians! he gasped. "Get Myrtle out of the way, quick!"

CHAPTER IV.

WHIRLWIND.

WITH the cat-like quickness which he always showed in moments of danger, Old Pegs sprung to the door and dropped the heavy bars in their places, while Myrtle closed and barred the blinds. It was not done a moment too soon, for they heard the rapid beat of hoofs and could tell by the sounds that a large party of Indians were in the valley. Rafe Norris stepped to one of the loop-holes always left when a cabin is built in an Indian country, and looked out and saw that it was the band of Whirlwind.

"Now then, what's the ticket?" demanded Old Pegs. "Is it going ter be a b'ar-fight?"

"There seems to be no other course," replied Norris.

"Oh, yes, thar is," replied the old hunter. "I've got more than one string to my bow, and we kin fight or hide, jest ez you like."

"My plan would be to get the lady into the hiding-place you speak of, and then teach these Indians what it means to attack three well-armed white men."

"Jest my plan," said Old Pegs. "Wait a minnit."

He turned to assist Dave who was trying to draw out the arrow which had lodged in the fleshy part of the shoulder. But it had not passed quite through, and the barbs would not permit him to draw it out.

"Let me take hold," said Old Pegs. "Look the other way, Myrtle."

He grasped the shaft of the arrow, and by a quick movement forced it through the flesh, so that the head appeared. Dave bore the pain without even wincing, and the old man broke off the arrow, threw down the head, and drew out the broken shaft.

"It don't amount to any thing," said Dave, cheerily. "Come with me, Myrtle; it won't be long before the Blackfeet pitch in, and I want a hand in the game."

"I don't want to go away," she answered. "I never raised a rifle against a human being

yet, but in a cause like this, I can do good service."

The red-skins had not yet seen the cabin, but half a dozen were out of the saddle running to and fro in search of Dave—who they knew must be concealed somewhere near at hand.

"They don't see us yet, I believe," said Dave, stepping to a loop-hole, "but it won't be long before they nose us out. Shall I give that skulking fellow a shot, old man?"

"Not yit," replied Old Pegs. "I don't want ter hit the fu'st blow."

Just then one of the savages discovered the cabin, and set up a yell which quickly called the attention of the rest. Not a few of them had rifles, and dismounting they began to creep up toward the mountain house.

"Wait a minnit, boys," said Old Pegs. "We'll give 'em a most immortal thrashing afore sundown or my name ain't Old Pegs. Thunder; what's that?"

A rattling volley was suddenly poured into the Blackfeet from the rear, and the scouts who had been seen crawling up to the cabin went back with wild yells of surprise, and sprung into the saddle, while counter yells arose from the front and flanks.

"Perhaps it is the brigade," said Myrtle, hopefully.

"Tain't so; d'ye think the boys in Farrell's brigade yell like that? Them's Injuns, but what tribe and why they ar' sailing in on the Blackfeet, the devil may know. Let's rush out and help 'em, anyhow."

The wound of Dave Farrell was at best but a slight one, and rushing out with Old Pegs and Rafe Norris, all armed with heavy rifles, they began to blaze away at the now retreating Blackfeet. Assailed thus in front, flank and rear, these gallant men did not give up but fought with a devotion to their leader which would have done credit to men of a higher civilization. One by one they dropped from their saddles until only five were left, and among these the brave chief Whirlwind, who had passed unscathed through the hail-storm of leaden balls.

"Dogs!" cried the chief, shaking his lance in the air. "Whirlwind will go, but when he comes again his vengeance will be terrible."

Calling to the few men who surrounded him, he wheeled his horse and dashed away across the little valley, making no further effort to force his way through the pass which was so closely environed by his enemies. Many dusky figures darted from the bushes on every hand, and shot after shot was sent after the flying horsemen, and while they were yet within short rifle range, three of Whirlwind's men dropped bleeding to the earth. But the chief seemed to bear a charmed life, and disappeared behind a clump of trees near the center of the glade. Many Indians were seen racing after him on foot, and it needed but a glance to show Old Pegs that they were Modoc Sioux, the inveterate enemies of the Blackfeet.

"Git cover, quick!" cried the old hunter. "They'll see us."

"It is of no use to hide," replied Rafe Norris. "I, for one, mean to yield myself a prisoner, and I advise you to do the same."

The words had scarcely left his lips when he experienced a strange sensation. A vise-like grip fell upon his shoulder, and the steel muzzle of a pistol was pressed against his temple. This pistol was held by Dave Farrell, whose teeth were firmly set and whose eyes seemed to emit flashes of light.

"Move a step until I order you, wag a finger even, and you die."

"What means this conduct?" hissed Rafe, white with contending passions. "Do you mean to murder me in cold blood?"

"Not a bit of it. You see those Indians coming this way, don't you?"

"What of that?"

"Order them to halt."

"I don't know what you mean. Am I to be killed like a dog, you old villain? Why do you stand there like a stone and make no effort to aid me?"

"Better do as Dave asks you, Rafe. It ain't a bad plan to try the 'speriment."

"But I know nothing of these Indians."

"Ef Dave hez made a mistake, he's ter make it right with you," answered Old Pegs.

"One more chance before I scatter your brains upon the sod," hissed Dave. "Will you stop those Indians? Speak their language—you know how."

Rafe Norris cast one look at the stern face of the captain of scouts, and saw that a refusal would be death to him. He turned and shouted to the advancing Indians, and to the surprise of Old Pegs, who thought that Dave had made a mistake, they halted immediately, while cries of surprise could be heard among them, and the others came running up. Those who had been halted by the command of Rafe Norris pointed him out as he stood in the grasp of Dave, and it was plain that they knew him and were surprised to see him in his present position.

"Do you see that, Old Pegs?" cried Farrell. "Now do you tell me that this fellow knows nothing of the Modoc Sioux?"

"Stranger," said Old Pegs, "I've warmed a viper in my buzzum. Now then, order them p'izen sarpints ter git. The quicker they go, the longer they'll hev the satisfaction on knowing that you ar' alive."

Rafe saw that the game was up, and that he might as well save his life if possible.

"What shall I tell them?"

"Tell 'em to go down to the sulphur spring at the base of the North Canyon, and wait fur you thar."

Rafe hesitated, but the circle of cold steel upon his temple cowed him for the time, and he shouted the required order. Signal cries were heard, and the pursuers of Whirlwind came back on the run, having been unsuccessful in their attempt to overtake that redoubted chief who had found some avenue of escape. The orders of Rafe Norris were repeated, and the whole party trooped away down the pass, leaving Rafe still in the hands of Farrell.

"I suspected you from the very start," said Dave. "It is useless for you to attempt to deceive us, for we know you now. You are a Hudson Bay man, and I know it."

"You lie."

"Be careful, my boy. You are a prisoner,

and I don't like to injure a man who is so completely in my power, but don't use bad language. You fellows have done us such good service in breaking up the party of Whirlwind that I am inclined to be rather lenient to you, but at the same time we won't stand everything."

"Do you mean to keep me a prisoner?"

"I have not decided what to do with you yet. No doubt our old friend here will give you house-room for to-night, and after that we will see what can be done."

"You shall repent this if I can escape from your hands, as you may be sure I will do some day. I will never rest until I have your life."

"Enough of that. Have you got a piece of good buckskin handy, old man? I think we had better tie this feller's feet."

Old Pegs drew from the bosom of his hunting-shirt, two or three stout buckskin thongs which he used in tying the hands of Norris behind his back. Having performed this service to his satisfaction, he linked the feet of the prisoner together at the ankles in such a way that he could take a step of about six inches, but no more.

"Thet's all right, Dave," he said. "Now, who in thunder is thet chap?"

A man in greasy buckskin was seen running rapidly toward them with a pet bear, Bruin, close at his heels, evidently bent on mischief. Old Pegs ran up to meet him, shouting to the bear, and managed to interfere before Bruin could clutch his prey—a proceeding which the bear resented with low growls of discontent, while the new-comer sat down puffing, with a very red face and looked at his rescuer.

"Durn the b'ar!" he growled. "What d'ye keep sech a pheroxious beast fur, stranger?"

"Jest fer greens, my boy," replied Old Pegs. "Seems ter me strangers ar' gitting rather thick in this hyar clearing. Who the devil be you?"

"I'm a poor critter that's jest got away from the p'izen Injuns, and I come mighty nigh bein' swallowed by a b'ar, by gracious."

The speaker would never have been "hung for his good looks," although he might have suffered for irreclaimable homeliness. He was a tall, thin specimen of the mountain-man, with shaggy hair and beard, and a snaky eye which was far from pleasant to look at.

"What Injuns did you git away from, stranger?" demanded Old Pegs.

"Them cussid Modoc Sioux. You 'see, they ketched me up hyur, by the big spring, when I was trying to find the trapping brigade, and they tuk traps, rifle and all ez clean ez a whistle. I ain't got hide nor h'ar left."

The man did indeed look forlorn enough. His clothing hung in tatters; he had no hat, and the blood was flowing from a ragged cut across his forehead, where a bullet had grazed the skin.

"Thet was a clust rub, stranger."

"It were, mate, mighty clust. Ye see I made a break when they pitched inter the Blackfeet, and one of them fired at me, and gev me this beauty spot."

"Very kind in him, I must say. What are these Sioux doing here at this time?"

"I dunno; they ar' out of ther stamping-ground a smart heap."

"You bet; who is ther leader?"

"I dunno his name; but I think they called him Curly-headed Ned. Anyhow, thet's a name he's got on the border."

"Did you see him?"

"He didn't show hisself while I was thar. I say, boss, who's that you've got in that outlandish hitch?"

"Thet chap, we think, knows too much about these Modoc Sioux, and konseckently we jist tuk the liberty of kinder hitching him up."

"The varmint! Let me get at him and I'll chaw him up, audacious. Yah—hip! I want his ha'r. Lend me a knife, some one; a hairpin, a toothpick—any cussid thing. I will hev his wool."

"You don't say thet you are so hot arter blood ez thet ar', stranger? No, I reckon not; he's our meat, and we don't 'low nobuddyy else to tech him."

"Tain't fa'r, anyhow, boss. Hyar I stand jest out of ther blasted hitch and it hurts my feelin's powerful bad, because I ain't let to mount him. Say, you p'izen sarpint," he cried, shaking his clinched hand under Rafe's nose, "why kain't I chaw ye up?"

"You are a fit associate for these two ruffians," replied Norris, proudly. "It would not surprise me if they allowed you to murder me while my hands are tied."

"Oh, thunder, ef they only would! Say, boss, kain't I hit him once, fur luck?"

"You are over zealous in the cause," said Farrell, coldly. "Stand aside and let the prisoner alone."

"Little boy," replied the escaped man, "you hurt my feelin's awful when you talk that way, and I shill feel obliged to jump on ye with both feet."

"That's enough, my man," replied Farrell, laying his hand upon a pistol. "What is your name?"

"I ain't heeled—that's what's the matter with me—an' you've got the gaff's on. It ain't ekal—that's what I say—it ain't ekal, and you know it ain't. Let me hev a fourteen-inch toothpick in my hand, and ef I don't crow loud, my name ain't Velveteens."

"Is that your name? Come, come; you should not quarrel with us, if you want help."

"Velveteens, the boys call me, and they call me that becoz I'm nat'rally so soft and tender-hearted. I be, by gracious! I'm too good fur this wicked, wicked world."

"What do you want?"

"I was gwine to jine the brigade, but I'm afeard thar ain't no chance now. I've lost my traps and shootin'-irons."

"That will not trouble you if you can prove yourself a true man. However, you can pass the night here, and in the morning we'll see what can be done."

"Much obliged. Who be you?"

"Captain Farrell, of the trapping brigade."

"Whew! And to think I lowered myself to r'ile up at you. It was durned ridiculous."

Dave Farrell took the prisoner in charge, led him to the cabin, and put him in a small room in the rear. Rafe did not look up as he heard Myrtle's exclamation of surprise, but passed on sullenly to his prison, where he sunk down upon

the floor and dropped his head upon his arms. The moment the door closed upon Farrell he sprung to his feet and laughed scornfully, for he knew his power well. Yet he listened earnestly while Dave told Myrtle the story to which she listened with a look of horror.

"Revenge is sweet," he muttered. "My hour will come."

CHAPTER V.

A COWARD'S DEED.

By the time the Indian dead were buried, darkness had come and the party were gathered in the large room of the cabin at supper. They were quite merry, and Rafe listened with a grim smile as the man who called himself Velveteens recounted the manner of his capture and escape at length, going into particulars as to time and place.

"The rascal!" muttered Rafe. "Oh, he is a precious villain, if his story is true."

Shortly after Old Pegs brought the prisoner something to eat, removing his bonds while he did so, in order to give him the use of his hands.

Rafe ate in gloomy silence, when he was carefully tied up again by Old Pegs and left alone. Velveteens was entertaining Dave Farrell and Myrtle whit an account of the country in the region of the "big pines" of California, and Old Pegs dropped into the circle to listen. Bruin was there, too, and strangely enough seemed to have taken a decided dislike to Velveteens, and showed a disposition to attack him from time to time. It was only the authority of his master which served the unfortunate captive from trouble.

"I don't know what's got inter you, Bruin," said his master. "I'm ashamed of you; don't you know yer friends?"

"That b'ar ain't safe," said Velveteens; "and I reckon you'd better shoot him."

"Shoot him? I'd raise that man's ha'r that did it, by gracious. Go on with yer bird's eggging, stranger; spin another yarn about them big pines."

"You keep the b'ar off me, then."

To please the fellow, Old Pegs put the bear out of the cabin and came back.

"What do ye do with that b'ar o'nights, boss?" Velveteens asked.

"We leave him outside; a mighty good watchdog, is Bruin. He don't 'low no one to go slashing round this house, arter dark."

The countenance of Velveteens fell several degrees and he lost his usual loquacity. The subject of the bear seemed to trouble him, and he returned to it again, insisting upon it that such an animal ought to be chained during the night.

"I reckon ye'r skeery about b'ars," said Old Pegs. "I'll humor you this time, and shut the b'ar up behind the house."

This was done and Velveteens seemed more at ease, though Bruin kept up a fearful growling in his prison, tearing at the logs and snapping at his chain. Old Pegs went out on a scout, taking his new friend with him, and leaving Dave with Myrtle. I don't know how it was done, but before half an hour had passed the two had forgotten their little "tiff" of the morning and were sitting side by side, hand

clasped in hand, as only lovers sit, while through the chinks in the walls of the prison Rafe Norris glared at them.

"How long must I wait for revenge?" he muttered. "Oh, I will make him repent in dust and ashes the hour he led me, bound like a dog, into her presence. And you, proud rustic beauty, shall know what it is to scorn the love of such a man as I!"

Old Pegs came back at last, and announced that they had seen no signs of Indians, and had reason to believe that they had decamped entirely. He found the young couple very much engaged over a book which Dave had brought from the fort, and grinned widely as he saw the trouble was over.

"Hev you looked at the pris'ner while I've been gone?" demanded Old Pegs.

Dave looked a trifle foolish, for, if the truth must be told, he had forgotten that such a person as Rafe Norris existed. Old Pegs laughed and opened the door of the room, where he saw Rafe extended on the floor, apparently asleep. Velveteens looked over his shoulder, as he did so.

"He's a desprut mean cuss, *that*, I'll bet on," he said. "D'ye mean to stand guard all night?"

"No; he kain't git away."

"Then I wish ye'd show me a place to sleep, fur I'm 'most mortal tired. I've hel a hard time, lately."

The hunter gave the man a blanket, and he wrapped it about him and lay down on the floor, quite near the door of the room in which Rafe Norris was confined. The lovers paid but little attention to him and sat, until quite late, talking in low tones, which he could not hear if he had been inclined to do so. Old Pegs stepped into a sort of alcove in one corner, and, satisfied that all was safe, soon fell asleep.

Some hours after, Dave came in to share his blanket, while Myrtle went into the curtained recess where she slept.

Two hours later, Velveteens, who had been not only asleep but snoring, raised his head softly and looked about him. The moon was shining brightly, and he could see every object in the room distinctly.

The loud snoring of Old Pegs and the heavy breathing of Dave Farrell satisfied him that they were asleep, and raising himself softly—for, as we have said, he slept quite close to the prison-door—he pulled the latch-string, and the door swung open without noise.

It looked as if Rafe Norris had expected to see him, for he lay upon the floor with his head close to the door, and when Velveteens lay down again, shifted his position so as to keep his hands in view.

Some steel instrument gleamed in the moonlight, and the bonds fell from the hands of the prisoner; a moment more, and his feet were also free. He now sat up and began to rub his feet and ankles vigorously, to restore the lost circulation, while Velveteens lay down and began to snore in such a perfect manner that no one would have dreamed for a moment that he was not asleep.

Ten minutes later, Rafe Norris stood in the main room and took up Old Pegs's knife, which lay upon a stool, and seemed about to rush into

the recess where the two men slept, when Velveteens threw his arms about him, and held him fast.

"What's that?" demanded the gruff voice of Old Pegs.

Quick as thought, Rafe darted back into the room and closed the door, just as the huge head of Old Pegs was thrust out of the recess.

"I wanted a drink," said Velveteens.

"Thar's some in the bucket; but why in thunder do you wake a feller in this way? I don't like it, not to speak of," growled the hunter.

"I was awful dry," replied Velveteens, as he took up the gourd. "I won't trouble you again to-night."

Old Pegs went back with a snort of disapproval, and again fell asleep. When satisfied of this, Velveteens tapped once on the door, and it swung open as softly as before. Rafe Norris had seen that it was idle to attempt revenge upon his enemies now, as both of them slept so lightly, and following Velveteens, he crept toward the door, when they heard a deep growl and the rattle of a chain.

Bruin had in some way broken loose and dragged himself to the door, lying across the threshold. The two men looked at each other in confusion and dismay, for they dared not pass out while that gigantic sentinel lay in the way.

"Go back to yer room," whispered Velveteens. "I've got some wolf-bait hyar, and I'll fix the black cuss."

Rafe slipped back to the room, and Velveteens took down from the wall a piece of venison, which might have weighed four pounds. This he cut open, and from a pocket of his ragged hunting-shirt he now took a bottle, from which he shook into the cut a quantity of a whitish substance and then closed up the orifice he had made.

The window was partially raised, and thrusting out his hand, he dropped the meat under the nose of Bruin, who snapped it up greedily and devoured it in the twinkling of an eye. Having done his work, Velveteens lay down again, while Rafe watched from the open door of the room in which he had been confined, ready to make a rush if either Dave or Old Pegs came out of the recess.

A few moments later, they heard a scuffling, confused sound and the rattle of a chain, as if the bear was running away at the top of his speed.

Velveteens chuckled and beckoned to Rafe, who again came out softly, and the two stood in the middle of the room a moment; and then, opening the door carefully, they went out together, closing the door after them, while the others, never dreaming of the escape, slept profoundly.

It was nearly morning when Old Pegs rose, took up his rifle—which always lay within reach of his hand—and went out into the main room.

He saw that the blanket of Velveteens was empty, and the door of the prison open. Springing to the door, he looked in, and his cry of rage awoke Dave, who started up and came out, to find Old Pegs dancing wildly about the room, swearing like a trooper.

"He's a nice cuss, that Velveteens, he is!" he screamed. "He 'scaped from the Sioux—he

did! Oh, knives and razor-grinders! Oh, dog every button on my shirt, he's cheated us!"

"Gone!" cried Dave, in dismay.

"Yaas, gone; gone like a thief in the night. Fled like a shadder, leaving no sign to mark the spot whar he laig down. Oh, how it grinds me that I didn't let old Bruin chaw him up."

"He is evidently in league with the Sioux and Rafe Norris," said Dave. "Shall we try to follow them?"

"And what makes me so cussid mad," continued Old Pegs, paying no attention to the question, "he got me ter chain up Bruin over night. He knowed right well, the owdashus cuss, that the b'ar would never hev let him out."

"What shall we do?" demanded Dave. "It isn't safe to waste any time if these Modoc Sioux are really his men."

"What is the matter, father?" cried Myrtle from her sleeping apartment.

"They've dug out, both them low-lived skunks," snarled Old Pegs. "Git up and dress, gal; we must git out'n this mighty quick. Dave, come with me."

They ran out of the house, and quickly found the trail which led out of the little valley to the south. Following it rapidly, they soon satisfied themselves that their enemies had really left the valley, going toward the "Sulphur Spring," where Rafe had appointed the rendezvous.

"They've gone ter jine the Injins," said Old Pegs. "Won't you be so good ez to give me a big kick, Dave? I deserve it."

"What is done—is done," replied Dave, "and we can not avoid it. What is that by the spring yonder?"

"It looks like Bruin," replied Old Pegs. "The black thief got away arter all, and I wonder he let 'em go."

"Probably he did not break away until after their departure," replied Dave. "Let us call him."

He gave a shrill whistle, the call which Bruin always answered, but to their surprise the bear did not move. Running up hastily, they found the bear lying by the side of the spring, his tongue hanging out of his mouth, and a white foam lying thick upon the grass.

"He's dead, by the rock of Gibraltar!" roared the bear's master. "Them mean cusses hev killed him, but whar's the blood?"

"He has died in a different way," replied Dave. "Look at his mouth."

Old Pegs saw at a glance how his bear had died. He had killed too many wolves with strychnine, to have any doubt of the cause of his death, and his anger broke out afresh.

"Thar's going to be war when that Velve-teens and Old Pegs come together ag'in," said the old man in an unusually quiet tone, which he only used in moments of intense passion. "I'll raise his ha'r, or my name ain't what it is. Come along; it is only a half day's walk ter the spring, and they ar' thar afore now. They'll be up hyar by noon, the hull b'ilng, and we've got ter be ready."

As they turned to move away there was a movement in the bushes close to them, and a savage face looked out at them, his eyes burning with intense passion. It was Whirlwind, the

Blackfoot chief. He held in his hand a long bow and seemed about to fit an arrow to the string, but upon second thought replaced the bow and called to Old Pegs by name.

"Let Short Legs turn back and have a talk with a great chief," he cried.

"Durn my hide," said Old Pegs. "Whar did he come from? Shall we humor him, Dave? He seems ter be alone."

"It may benefit us much if we can make friends with him," replied Dave.

The two turned back hastily, and Whirlwind came quietly out of his place of concealment and met them. He seemed to have no fear of them, strongly armed as they were, and advanced boldly to meet them.

"Whirlwind is welcome," said Old Pegs in the Indian tongue. "Why is he here?"

"Last sun Whirlwind had many braves," replied the Indian, "but now, he has not one. The Sioux dogs trapped them like beaver, and they fell."

Old Pegs was silent, because he did not know how the Indian might regard his share in the battle of the day before.

"My brothers fought against the Blackfeet, too," continued the chief. "That was well, because the Blackfeet struck first when they did not know who they fought. Whirlwind would be a friend to Short Legs and the Beaver Captain."

"I am willing to be friends," replied Dave, "but you put an arrow through my shoulder yesterday."

"Yesterday we were enemies, to-day we will be friends."

"And to-morrow enemies again."

"Not if Whirlwind smokes a pipe with his white brothers. See; Whirlwind seeks vengeance on the Modoc Sioux, who have come into his country and killed his men. Short Legs and the Beaver Captain shall help him."

"Do you wish to be a friend of the man who was with us last sun?"

"No!" replied the chief, sullenly. "Whirlwind will not smoke a pipe with him."

"I am glad of that," continued Dave, "for he is our enemy. Let Whirlwind bring a pipe and we will smoke."

The smoking of the peace-pipe was a binding obligation to the Indians, who would not begin a war again until the men with whom they had smoked had been fairly warned. A pipe was lighted and passed from mouth to mouth, and the ceremony was complete.

"Whirlwind will go now," said the chief. "Let my brothers trap beaver in the hills in peace when winter comes, the Blackfeet will not harm them. Look for my warriors when the sun sets twice by the three great rocks."

He waved them farewell, and started away at a quick pace, taking a direction across the mountain. For two hours the whites were occupied in carrying out of the house for concealment every article they wished to keep safe, and by the time the sun was at meridian the work was done, and they waited quietly for the coming of the Modoc Sioux. An hour later they came trooping into the pass, when Old Pegs, who was on the watch, quietly retired into the cabin and shut the door.

CHAPTER VI.

A GREAT SURPRISE.

THE Modoc Sioux seemed to know the situation of the house well and scattered the moment they reached the front, and remained still as death, waiting for the order to advance. The shutters were closed upon the windows of the cabin, and the heavy door in its place, but not a sound was heard. It was plain that the Modocs knew the desperate character of the men in the house, for they made no effort to advance as yet.

They did not like the silence which reigned about the building, for it seemed to them the silence of desperation. Unwilling to waste their men, one was sent forward with a flag. He was a half-breed, and spoke a sort of mixture of French and English.

"Ah, you; in ze house."

No reply; the same dreadful silence reigned.

"Vill you open door?" cried the envoy, again.

"Let us in; smoke pipe."

Still no reply. Nothing about the house showed that a human being occupied it, and the man retreated in alarm, fearing a shot.

The leaders of the savages did not make their appearance, but it soon became apparent that some movement was on foot. The sound of axes could be plainly heard, and about twenty Indians appeared carrying a small tree from which the limbs had been cut within a foot of the trunk leaving a good hold for the hands. This was a battering ram with which to beat down the door. Keeping behind the bushes as much as possible, they reached a place within a hundred paces of the door, when they laid the log down and took breath before the final effort. A man in Indian garb with a hideously painted face directed their movements.

"Remember, sons of the Sioux," the leader, said, "that these men killed Half-breed Jack and Tusalah. Avenge these brave men who fell for the honor of the tribe. Now!"

They took up the log and at the signal word sprung out of the thicket with the butt of the log directed toward the door. All expected to hear the rifles speak the moment they came in view, but to their utter surprise not a shot was fired and the heavy log struck the door with a dull thud. It resisted bravely, but a second blow made the bars crack and the moment after the stout door fell into the room and the course was clear.

Foremost among those who poured in over the shattered door was the painted wretch who had said that Old Pegs and Dave had killed the two Sioux the day before. He held a hatchet in one hand and a pistol in the other, and uttered a cry of triumph as they entered, unopposed. But, to his dismay the place was empty! Nearly all the furniture had been removed. Even the books were gone, and those he sought had vanished utterly. Weapons in hand they rushed through the deserted rooms hoping to find the man they hated concealed somewhere, but they looked in vain.

"The white men are great medicine," said one of the Indians with a shudder. "Where have they gone?"

"We came too late," replied the leader angrily.

"While we loitered on the way they have fled."

"Shall we burn the house?"

"No; if you destroy the nest the birds will not return to it. Leave all as it is and some day they will come back and we shall have them."

The Indians loitered for some time about the place, picking up such articles as suited their fancy and appropriating them without remorse. An hour after the first assault they marched away through the pass, leaving the cabin in peace.

They had scarcely been gone ten minutes when Old Pegs stepped over the threshold, rifle in hand and followed on their trail. He was gone nearly half an hour, and when he returned Dave had already repaired the broken door, and replaced the furniture, while Myrtle was setting the table for a meal.

"Haw, haw, folks!" roared Old Pegs. "Did you ever see a more 'stonished set of varmints in your born days? It was ez good ez a play."

"They were taken by surprise," replied Dave, "but if Myrtle had not been with us I could not have resisted the temptation of giving them a shot. Rafe Norris was not with them, after all."

"Durn him, he knowed he'd git a shot on sight and so did that cussid Velveteens. That b'ar he killed was worth a hundred sech copper-toed varmints ez him."

"Poor Bruin," said Myrtle; "he was great company for me when you were absent, father."

"I know he were, and he had an advantage over some humans I've knowed—you c'u'd trust him! The devil won't allus guard his own, and some day I'll git ekeal to thet Velveteens, bet yer life!"

The party reoccupied the house as a matter of course, and seemed to think nothing of the late raid. After eating a hearty meal Old Pegs started out on a scout, leaving Dave to guard Myrtle. He followed the trail of the savages by devious ways for nearly six miles over a rugged road, part of which he had never trod before.

"They've got a camp some'ers nigh at hand," he muttered, "and I'm going ter find out whar it is ef it takes a leg. I know the Hudson Bay people, and I'll be darned ef they ever sot ther men ter do this kind of work. The trail freshens a bit; I'll hev ter look out."

He hitched along at his usual rate of speed, throwing out his shoulders in his peculiar manner until the low murmur of voices could be heard coming up from the foot of the slope below him. Old Pegs at once left the trail and plunged into the bushes, following the sounds which he heard, and advancing by slow degrees, for he knew that his life was not worth a moment's purchase if he should be taken.

Suddenly, almost without warning, he came to the edge of a high bluff, and parting the bushes which fringed the bank, looked down. It was one of those valleys so common among the foot-hills, and so surrounded by inaccessible mountains as to be a safe refuge.

The valley was now a great camp, for not less than two hundred men were scattered about at various points, engaged in different ways. Two-thirds of the whole force were Indians to all outward appearance, but seeing a painted brave seated under a tree reading a book, convinced Old Pegs that all were not Indians who wore the garb.

The remainder of the men were of all nationalities, chiefly French Canadians and half-breeds. A very few were English, but these kept apart, and seemed to have little intercourse with the rest.

Who were these men, and what were they doing in the grounds of the Northwest Company? The strife between those two great monopolies, the Hudson Bay and Northwest, was at this time at its height, and Old Pegs knew who they were, and what their object was in coming here.

"Thar'll be a b'ar-fight when Dave's boys git wind of this yer'," thought the old hunter. "It's all fa'r, long ez they only bring whites ag'in' whites, but when it comes ter Injuns, thet's cutting it too fat. Oh, thunder! thar's thet cussid Velveteens."

It was indeed this individual, who at that moment turned so that Old Pegs had a fair view of his face. He was no longer dressed in the ragged garb which he had worn in the rescue of Rafe Norris, but in a jaunty hunting-dress with black belt and silver buckles, armed to the teeth, and looking what he really was—a desperado of the first class.

"I'd like ter pop him over," thought Old Pegs, as he threw forward his rifle. "He sartingly deserves it. But what a was-ups' nest I'd bring about my ears ef I did shoot."

The fingers of the old man itched to take a shot at the man who had cheated him out of his prisoner and killed the pet bear in such a cowardly way. It made his blood boil to see him swaggering about in his gaudy dress, giving orders here and there with the air of a man in authority. At length he paused and stood with one hand grasping his rifle, the hand out of the line of his body, and stooped to speak with the Indian who was reading.

"Durn him!" growled Old Pegs, "I won't kill him, but I'll score his knuckles for him."

The rifle came up slowly, for he wished to make an accurate shot. Slowly, slowly, the keen eyes looking through the double sights, until the right hand of Velveteens was fully in range.

Crack!

The rifle dropped from the hand of the desperado; he uttered a wild yell of rage and pain, and the band ran up to him in wonder to find his right hand minus the index finger, which had been cut completely away by the ball. Old Pegs had clapped his hand instantly over the muzzle of his rifle, and stopped the vent, so that the smoke could not betray his presence, and without waiting to note more thn that his bullet had reached the mark, plunged into the mountain defiles at the top of his speed. In the mean time Velveteens, wild with passion, was giving vent to a series of atrocious oaths, which would have disgraced a Thames barger in his most furious moods.

"Only one man in the kentry could do it," screamed the injured man, "and that man is Old Pegs. What d'ye stand gauping at me fur, you skunks of misery? Git up thar, half a hundred of ye, and chase the old thief to his hole. I'll give a hundred dollars to the man, white or red, that brings me his scalp."

There were men in the party to whom a hun-

dred dollars was ample payment for taking a human life, and in the twinkling of an eye a score of swift runners were on the track of Old Pegs.

"See here," said one of the ruffians, "we mou't ez well chase the wind. Let's you and I git hosses and go round to his place and meet him."

The plan pleased all, and rapidly descending the slope, four of the most desperate villains in the party mounted and rode away at a rapid trot by the shortest roads they knew, to reach the little valley in advance of Old Pegs, who they knew would return to it before the day was out. But they had eight miles to go, and the route taken by Old Pegs was only four; and when the men rode into the valley they were surprised to see the old hunter before them, running rapidly toward the house. Two or three shots were fired without effect, and Old Pegs disappeared behind the bushes. Dave Farrell heard the shots and darted out, rifle in hand, meeting his friend at the doorway.

"Only four of the cusses, Dave," he said, contemptuously. "We ain't going to run from sech ez they."

"Not if we know it," replied the young man, fitting a cap on his rifle with great care. "You take the man on the right as they come in sight, and I'll see after the one on the left. Then get cover and load."

The horsemen came on at a mad gallop, for they seemed to have Old Pegs in a trap. But, rounding the point of the thicket, they found themselves looking into the muzzles of two deadly rifles, and before they could even check the headlong speed of their horses, two saddles were empty and the borderers had disappeared behind the bushes. Their own rifles were empty, for they had fired on Old Pegs, and had not since loaded, but there was no time to stop and turn.

"Forward!" cried one of the men. "We are man to man."

Seeing that they did not attempt to use their rifles, and knowing by this that the weapons were empty, Old Pegs stepped out into the open space and cried "halt!" The command enforced by the leveled revolvers was too much for the two men, and they pulled their horses to a halt.

"Git down!" was the next command. "Throw up."

This brief speech meant that they were not only to halt, but to raise their hands above their heads. The men obeyed without demur.

"Come hyar."

The two ruffians marched up to the muzzles of the revolvers, each face showing that they felt the tenure of life to be precarious in a high degree. Dave Farrell came forward and took away the weapons of the two men, and bound them hand and foot, while Old Pegs overlooked the work with a cocked revolver in his hand.

"Now, don't you seem ter be a couple of low-lived galloots, you two?" growled the hunter. "Don't you seem mean ez p'izen?"

They looked it certainly, and stood with down-cast eyes, evidently uncertain what their fate was to be.

"You come hyar ter kill me—kill Old Pegs, a man thet hez tramped these hills for thirty year,

man and boy. Didn't you, now? String 'em up ter thet bush, Dave; we'll make it hot fur 'em."

The two scoundrels were stripped to the skin, and some stout switches cut, with which the ruffians were belabored until they roared for mercy. This border vengeance being accomplished, they were tied on their horses with the face to the tail, and led to the mouth of the ravine.

"You got off mighty easy this time, gents," said Old Pegs. "I'm mighty 'shamed ter let you go so easy, but don't come ag'in. You don't want any more off me, do you?"

"No," replied one of the men sincerely. "I've got enough."

"Well, we kin keep yer weepens to remember you by, and we've give you su'thing to make us dear to you. Who sent you arter me?"

"Velveteens."

"Did he know who shot at him?"

"You bet."

"Giv' him my love, and say I'll meet him some day and squar' accounts. Now git."

A cut from the switches upon the flanks of each horse, sent them thundering down the ravine, bobbing about in a grotesque manner, to the intense amusement of the two hunters, who watched them laughingly, until they turned an angle in the pass and were lost to view.

CHAPTER VII.

CATCHING A TARTAR.

A WEEK passed by, and nothing more was heard of the band who had made their camp in the valley which Old Pegs had reached upon the day when he tried his skill upon Velveteens. They had decamped suddenly, and where they had gone and what they meant to do was still a subject of debate. Old Pegs did not give up his caution, and never entered the passes without first satisfying himself that they did not conceal an enemy. But, as day after day passed, and nothing suspicious occurred, he began to think that all was safe.

"Tell you what it is, Dave," he said. "You seem to hev forgotten thet thar is sech a thing ez a trapping-brigade in the world; by gracious, yes."

Dave looked a little disconcerted; for, to tell the truth, he had not been able to break away from Myrtle, who seemed more beautiful day by day.

"I—I did not like to go away while there was danger," he stammered.

"Jess so; but that bird won't fight no longer, and I guess you'd better go down and see the boys. I don't keer ef I go with you."

"And leave Myrtle alone?"

"She knows what ter do ef any one comes," replied Old Pegs. "Don't you, gal?"

"I am not afraid," was the reply. "Besides, I don't think that we shall be troubled any more."

"Perhaps not, but it is safe to be on the safe side. Keep a bright lookout, and if you see any one let them find an empty house."

"I will keep my carbine handy, too," replied the spirited girl. "But, father is right, Dave; you have a duty to perform, and have no right

to leave it for me. I like to have you attend to the work which is given to you to do."

Old Pegs prudently departed, and the lips of the lovers met in a long, clinging kiss. Then she pushed him away with a heightened color, and watched them as they passed out of the valley, leaving her alone.

The day passed slowly, although much of it was spent in study. After dinner she took her carbine—a weapon with the use of which she was familiar—and leaving the house went up the mountain in pursuit of game. An antelope was not long in presenting itself, and quickly fell before her unerring aim. Loading again she was engaged in putting on a cap, when two men suddenly started up in the sage-bush beside her, in the foremost of whom she recognized Velveteens—his hand bound up in a bloody cloth. The other was an Indian in the dress of the Modoc Sioux.

"Hyar's luck, Anatole!" bawled Velveteens. "Little gal, how ar' ye?"

"None the better for meeting you," she replied, with her hand still upon the lock of the carbine, which she cocked by a quick movement.

"What do you want?"

"Nothin', nothin', gal; only we'd like to hev ye take a walk with us. Thar's a young man in our camp lit'rally sp'ilin' to see ye, an' ye've got to go, little gal. Ketch hold ov her, Anatole."

The Indian made a leap and instantly fell, shot through the shoulder. The ball had no sooner left the barrel of Myrtle's carbine than Velveteens bounded forward with a panther-like spring, but stopped in dismay as he met the shining barrel of a cocked revolver pointed at his head.

"Back!" she cried sternly. "Fall back, I say! I would not have your blood upon my hands, but for my honor's sake I would kill a hundred such men and think I had doped the world good service. Put up your hands! If you try to draw a weapon I will kill you. Up; higher still!"

The ruffian hesitated, but, as she was about to fire, he raised his hands quickly at their full stretch, and she advanced with the revolver pointed at his heart and her finger on the trigger, and took his revolvers from his belt and dropped them on the sod. His knife and hatchet followed, and she stepped back a little, still transfixing him with her eyes.

"Fall back a little!" she said.

He stepped back about six paces, when she again called him to a halt, and advancing picked up the weapons he had dropped and hurled them down a deep ravine close at hand. The weapons of the Indian followed, rifle and all, and the two were weaponless and at the mercy of a girl.

"You have made a slight mistake in the character of the woman with whom you are dealing, my good sir," she said. "Send that Indian away; he is not so badly wounded but he can walk."

"What ar' ye goin' to do?"

"Obey my orders; I am not here to answer questions."

"You kin go back to camp, Anatole," said Velveteens, "but don't you say anything about

"this yer', or I'll kill yo when I come back; now ye hear me."

The Indian staggered to his feet and hurried away down the mountain-path.

"I won't forgit this yer', gal," said Velveteens in a tone of deadly menace, "you may be sure of that."

"I don't mean that you shall, sir," she answered calmly. "There is the antelope I have killed which I wish to have carried home. Pick it up and go in front."

Groaning in spirit, but seeing no way out of his dilemma, the scoundrel picked up the carcass of the antelope and led the way down the hill, while Myrtle followed closely, holding her revolver ready.

It was nearly an hour's walk to the cabin, but she would neither suffer him to pause nor lay down his load. At last they went down the path into the valley and he dropped his burden at the door.

"Thanks," she said. "I was afraid I should be obliged to leave the greater part of my game on the mountain, but you happened along so luckily that I am delighted. Does it occur to you at this moment, Mr. Velveteens, that you are most beautifully sold?"

"You've got the whip hand, now, I reckon," was the answer; "but that won't always last. One of these yer days my chainee may come, an' when it does no one, not even Rafe, shall stop me when I want my revenge."

"I am not yet satisfied that I shall let you go," she answered. "You came here under false colors, and betrayed those who thought that they were giving you aid in time of need, while you were only studying a way to effect the release of Rafe Norris."

"He's my pard," was the reply. "You wouldn't ask a man to go back on his pard, would ye?"

"No; I cannot blame you so much for that; but you did a wicked and cruel act when you poisoned my pet bear."

"Who sez I did?"

"No matter; you did the deed, for your face betrays you. Why should I not keep you here until my father returns, to meet his vengeance?"

"He's marked me fur life," replied Velveteens, holding up his maimed hand. "Ain't that enough?"

"If I let you go, your first act will be to study new wrongs. I am afraid I must keep you a prisoner."

"Don't do it, gal," he pleaded, eagerly. "I must go back; I'm ruined forever ef I don't, ye see—and I'll promise anything—anything, ef ye'll only let me go."

"And you would break your promise as readily as it is made," she answered. "I do not know what to do in your case."

"See thar, gal; yender comes Whirlwind and his gang. Oh, let me git off, fur he'll take my scalp, sure."

"Away with you, then; save yourself if you can, but never let me see your face again."

He sprung away eagerly and began to clamber up the mountain rapidly, for Whirlwind and two of his chief warriors were already in view. Myrtle did not attempt to fly, but waited calmly

the approach of the chief, who dismounted and came forward, starting back in surprise at her great beauty.

"Short Legs's squaw, eh?" he said, in broken English. "No 'fraid of Whirlwind; he good friend to Short Legs and Beaver Captain."

"I am not afraid of the great Blackfoot chief," replied Myrtle, who had been told what to do in case Whirlwind came. "My father has left a message for him."

"Good; Whirlwind will read it."

She went into the cabin and came out with two pieces of bark inscribed with strange hieroglyphics. The chief looked at them intently, and seemed to understand them.

"It is good; tell Short Legs that Whirlwind will meet him at the place with many braves. Who is the man who goes up mountain; friend, eh?"

"He was my prisoner; but I have given him liberty, and allowed him to go."

"Brave man, eh?" said the chief, contemptuously. "Girl take him?"

"If the Blackfeet know a brave of the Sioux who is called Anatole, he can tell whether he is a brave man or not."

"Anatole is a dog, but he is brave," replied the chief.

"Anatole and this man would have made me a prisoner. I shot the Sioux, and took this man prisoner, and made him carry the deer from the mountain."

"Good!" said the chief, briefly. "The white girl is brave. A brave warrior must make the white girl his wife."

He said no more, but calling to his men they rode away rapidly, leaving the girl alone. It might have been an hour later when Old Pegs came into the valley.

"I've seen the brigade and they ar' having trouble," he said. "They've hed four men killed this week by the cussid Sioux."

"What do they want, father?" said Myrtle. "Why should they seek to drive our men away?"

Old Pegs explained, and it is well to give the substance of his remarks to explain the feelings which existed between the men of the "Hudson Bay Company" and the "Northwest." It was simply a question of boundaries. The Northern Company claimed the right to send their trapping parties where they pleased, and the Northwest disputed that claim. The parties which came out this season of the year were not trapping but "prospecting," in order to know the best places for trapping in the coming winter.

Both sides had men to whom fighting was a pastime, and it was known that they would shed blood sooner than suffer a rival to encroach upon their trapping-grounds. "The brigade" of which Dave Farrell was captain was composed of men who were the pick and flower of the mountaineers, and who came out with the expectation of fighting. Perhaps they exceeded their instructions, sometimes, for they were not likely to study the boundaries very closely, and good trapping-ground whether north or south of the line was, to use a border expression "their meat."

It would be bootless to tell all that Old Pegs

said and did when Myrtle told him what had happened since his departure. He raved, stamped, and launched all manner of invectives at the unlucky Velveteens.

"Nobuddy but a gal would hev let the cuss go," he grumbled. "Why didn't you keep him until Whirlwind came?"

"Father! could I do that? Bad as he is I could not give him up to Indian vengeance."

"I don't know but ye'r' right, Myrtle. You've got a tender heart even fur the meanest skunk on the face of the creatid 'arth, and thet's this same Velveteens. But, don't you hunt any more till we've cleaned out this truck. Keep out ov sight. Don't show yourself even to the Blackfoot, 'cause he mou't turn ag'in us. Let's folder up: I'm gitting mighty hungry."

Myrtle went into the cabin and prepared a meal and the two sat down to eat. When they had finished they were startled by the rattle of firearms away in the east. "The'r' at it," cried Old Pegs. "I've got ter take a hand."

CHAPTER VIII.

A BORDER BATTLE.

THE "brigade" had hailed with pleasure the return of their captain, for they had been in trouble. Men who had wandered away from the camp had been seen no more, until their lifeless bodies were found in some dark ravine, or on the prairie, scalped and gory. The brow of the Beaver Captain clouded as he heard the names of those who had fallen, four or five of his best men.

"This won't do, boys," he said. "Where is Massy?"

"Right side up, Cap," replied the man called Massy, a light, active borderer in buckskins and beaver cap. "What can I do?"

"I want a trailer—one who will track these dogs to their den. Will you do it?"

"I kin try, Cap; but ef I go under, jest send word to my wife that I did my duty, and git my pay fur her. Kin I take out Pat Dada with me?"

"Just as you like. Have you got fresh sign to follow anywhere?"

"Yes; I've got the trail they left when Boston Dick went under, last night."

"That's enough; now, boys, listen to me. There must be no straggling until we find out where these fellows hive. They think to drive us out of the Indian country, but if they do they must fight for it. What do you say?"

A ringing cheer was the only reply, and the men broke up into knots, canvassing the chances of meeting with the murderers soon. The brigade altogether numbered about seventy men, far less in number than the band of Velveteens, but every man was a dead shot, brave as a lion, and knew the country by heart. Massy and Pat Dada stole out of the camp, and as night came on Dave set his guards and took precautions which the others had neglected, and which had resulted so fatally. He felt tolerable certain that the calamities which had fallen upon them could be laid only to the blame of Velveteens and Rafe Norris, but was not sure.

Scarcely had the sun gone down, when the moon rolled up in the sky and shed a mellow radiance on the scene. Dave made the circuit

of the pickets about the edge of the strip of timber in which the camp was made, when he noticed, but upon the plain, a sort of wavering which rested on the grass and seemed to move slowly up. These black spots whatever they were puzzled him extremely, and he called the attention of the guard to them.

"I've hed my eye on those spots for the last ten minnits," replied the man, "and I'll be cussed if I can make 'em out. What was that?"

Both had caught the gleam of some metallic substance in the moonlight. Dave uttered a low exclamation, and caught the guard by the arm.

"There they come, by heaven! Stand firm now, and don't fire unless they make a rush."

Dave was right, for those dark shadows creeping up so slowly were the forms of their enemies gathering for a rush upon the camp. They were crawling along the short prairie grass, shading themselves as much as possible behind the hummocks, and getting as near as was safe to the line of woods before the rush was made. Velveteens was there, crouching upon the sod, and nursing in his heart the most bitter hatred of all who were dear to Myrtle.

Hark! They are gathering for the rush now, and weapons are tightly grasped as the whispered word of command goes down the line. The signal will be a shot from a rifle, and Velveteens is to give it. Rising slowly to his knees, he brought the deadly rifle to his shoulder, and pointed it at the motionless form of the guard who was talking with Dave Farrell, but, as the rifle came to a level, the man glided suddenly behind a tree, and Velveteens lowered the weapon in surprise.

"Lucky fur ye, my man," he muttered. "Thar; come on!"

The rifle cracked, and the bullet was buried in the tree behind which the guard was stationed, and the band rushed forward like leaping greyhounds. But, the rifle-shot seemed to be a signal to the others, and the whole front of the strip of woods is in a blaze, so rapid is the discharge of rifles about it. The trappers have not been caught napping, and the tables are turned upon the assailants who go down, man by man, fearfully decimated by the deadly fire.

"Whoop!" yelled one of the hunters. "Give 'em Hail Columby, boys, and durn the odds."

Half a dozen men leaped out to follow the discomfited assailants, unheeding the stern orders of Dave Farrell. They had scarcely showed themselves when four of them went down, for, although so many had fallen, the enemy was not yet beaten, but had paused for breath before a new attack, shattered by the band in the timber on either flank.

"Spread out there on the left and cover the corral," cried Dave. "They'll stampede the horses next."

The order did not come too soon, for the party who moved to the left in obedience found themselves face to face with forty or fifty Indians creeping up toward the corral. A hand-to-hand struggle began, and as both sides were reinforced, a battle royal began between the corral and the prairie. Neither party would give way an inch, and it was impossible to say who would conquer, when a shrill, peculiar whistle was

heard high above the tumult. Instantly the assailants gave way, and were seen scattered about the prairie in headlong flight, leaving their dead and wounded gasping upon the sod. The trappers would have followed, but Dave would not permit it.

"Enough has been done, boys," he cried. "We have given them a lesson which they will not soon forget, and I doubt if they will try their powers on us again. But, what made them give up so suddenly? They seemed to be holding us well when they broke away."

"It was nip and tuck," replied one of the men. "Durned ef I understand it."

"I heerd a whistle," replied another.

"I heard the signal too," said Dave. "Two or three of you fellows run out and see what they are doing."

Volunteers were plenty, and picking their way carefully through the dead and dying, they saw that the marauders were already in the saddle and headed for the foot-hills. The horse-guards had kept the animals well together, and they were not impeded in their flight. But, hardly had they disappeared when the scouts saw another line of horsemen streaming out from a distant pass, heading toward the timber, and they came back to report.

"A large force, boys?" demanded Dave.

"Nigh a hundred, Cap."

"Load up again, boys," said the Beaver Captain, "for we may have another tussle. Keep out of sight, and let every bullet find a mark. Be steady."

Just issued from a fierce struggle, and while some of their friends lay dead at their feet, these men cheerfully prepared for a new battle. The long line of horsemen came on, in Indian fashion, until about three hundred yards from the timber, when they halted, and two men rode out toward the camp, evidently with peaceful intent. As they came nearer, Dave recognized Old Pegs and Whirlwind.

"It's all right, boys," he cried; "lay down your guns and get torches. Some of our poor fellows need our aid."

While the men were making preparations, he slipped out to meet the new-comers.

"Don't tell me I ain't in time, Dave," growled Old Pegs, "acause I'd be like enuff ter hit ye. Them cusses bin at you, eh?"

"They gave us a benefit just now. If you want fun, Whirlwind, you may overtake them before they get very deep into the foot-hills."

"Whirlwind will go!" cried Whirlwind, his nostrils dilating.

"Set some scouts on them if you can't bring them to a fight, for we want to know where they go. The country has got to be cleared of this scum, anyhow."

Whirlwind made no reply, but calling to his men, they went off like the wind in the direction taken by the outlaws. Old Pegs looked after them wistfully.

"I'd like ter go with 'em, Dave, only if they ketch them critters I'm afraid Whirlwind will find himself in the position of the man that caught the Tartar. Lost some of yer boys?"

"Yes, too many, I am afraid," replied Dave. "Let us join them and see what the loss really is."

A careful search revealed the fact that five of his men had been killed and twice that number wounded. Of the assailants twelve were killed and five mortally wounded left upon the ground. The burial service was brief, each rough man bidding good-by to his friend in his rough way as they were laid beneath the sod, friend and foe together in a trench which was hastily thrown up by the men.

"Whirlwind has caught his Tartar, I reckon," said Dave, as the sound of rifles came up on the wind. "What a dressing those fellows will give the Blackfeet!"

The firing receded, growing fainter and fainter in the distance, and they began to think that the Blackfeet were driving the enemy before them.

"Dave," said Old Pegs, "I've bin thinking 'bout my gal and made up my mind. I'd hate to lose her, but I won't keep her here no more, and she's got ter go to the fort."

"I am glad to hear you say so," replied Dave, eagerly. "What made you come to that conclusion?"

Old Pegs related the adventure with Velvet-eens and Anatole.

"And you see, boy, this yer'mou't happen any day. Now give me ten men and I'll go up tomorrow and git her and we'll send her home with the brigade."

The plan suited Dave well, and early next morning the old hunter with ten men rode up to his cabin home, searching every pass before they entered it. The ride was a long one, and it was ten o'clock when Old Pegs dismounted at his door and went in.

The room was empty, but that did not seem to trouble him, for, after calling Myrtle's name once or twice, he pushed aside the curtains of the recess in which she slept and went in. A sort of clicking sound was heard directly after, and he was not seen for ten minutes, when the noise was again repeated and he sprang out into the empty room with a wild look on his face.

"She's gone!" he screamed. "Who hez robbed me of my child?"

"Hyar's a bit of paper, old man," said one of the trappers. "We found it on a split stick near the door. Shall I read it, old man?"

Old Pegs nodded with a savage look on his face, and the young man read the paper:

"This is to certify that, having come to the conclusion that the man known as Old Pegs is not lawfully the guardian of his lovely daughter—so called—therefore I, Rafe Norris, assume the guardianship, with the intention of making her my wife."

"RAFE NORRIS."

The old man took up the letter and looked at it grimly. "I'll wad it round a bullet, one day, he muttered. "God help him, when we meet ag'in. He'll git this paper back."

CHAPTER IX.

UNBIDDEN GUESTS.

WE left Myrtle in the cabin when her father rushed out as the crack of rifles announced the attack on the camp of the brigade. She felt no fear at being left alone, but closing the doors she read for some hours in her book and then retired for the night. She was up early, for the scoundrels might pass the cabin on their return, and she was always on her guard.

Stealing out while it was yet dusk, with her rifle ready, she spent an hour in scouting, and satisfied herself that no one was lurking about. Returning to the cabin she laid her rifle and revolvers on a bench by the door and went down to the spring after a bucket of water. For half an hour she dallied there by the spring. Then taking up the bucket she returned to the cabin and was putting the bucket on the bench when she heard a voice say:

"Good-morning, my dear; you look like an angel—you really do."

She uttered a low cry and looked for a weapon, for there, just within the door and leaning against the post, stood Rafe Norris, with a provoking smile upon his face.

"Why are you here?" she gasped. "What do you seek?"

"Revenge!" he hissed. "My band has been scattered, beaten, trampled under foot by these thrice-accursed trappers. My men have been butchered in this very valley by your so-called father and Dave Farrell, and those who were spared suffered the ignominy of the lash at their hands. I myself have been disgraced by bonds."

"Let me pass," said Myrtle. "I will not stay to bandy words with you."

"Listen to me, my girl," cried Rafe Norris, sternly. "If you leave this house alive, you leave it as my prisoner. I am determined to punish these two men, and I can think of no better way to do so than by taking you with me. I shall act fairly with you, and at the first station we reach you shall be my wife, for I cannot live without you."

"Let me pass," she repeated, trying to force her way by him with the design of reaching her carbine, which lay on the bench outside. "I will not stay here to be insulted."

"I am afraid you will have to stay until I give you leave to pass, my girl," replied Norris, pushing her back. "Do you think I do not know that if you reached the carbine, my life is not worth a moment's purchase? I honor your spirit, but you meet a man whose will is stronger than your own."

Myrtle sunk back on a stool and looked at him steadily. There was something in her dark eyes which did not bode well for him if she reached a weapon, and he laughed aloud.

"You little tiger-cat," he said, "what would you give for a pistol now?"

"I only wish I had one," she gasped.

"Here is one," he said, drawing the weapon from his belt and presenting the butt to her. "Let us see what use you will make of it."

She grasped the revolver with eager fingers, and quick as thought pointed it at his breast and pulled the trigger. The cap snapped, but there was not a cartridge in the chambers, and he laughed until the cabin rung again.

"You would do it, my fine girl," he said. "There! drop it; the weapon's not loaded, and I should be a fool to trust myself in your hands."

He had made a mistake in giving her any weapon. Throwing her hand back, she hurled the heavy revolver at his head, and it struck him fairly between the eyes, and for a moment he reeled blindly to and fro, half-stunned by the sudden and terrible blow.

This was the moment for Myrtle, and darting past him she caught up her carbine and cocked it quickly. By the time he had somewhat recovered from the blow, he saw her standing armed and ready, the carbine pointed at his heart.

"There is a load in *this* weapon, Mr. Rafe Norris," she said, with a merry laugh. "The tables are turned, I think. Take care! If you have any desire to live, do not dare to move hand or foot."

The tables were turned indeed.

"You dare not fire," he hissed. "Down with the carbine, girl."

"Dare not! You do not know what a woman will dare for her honor, which is dearer to her than life."

The base man saw that he was conquered, and that the eyes which flashed along the tube of the carbine were lurid with a baleful light.

"Shoot," he said, fiercely. "I will not turn in my tracks to save my life, and am ready to die. Why do you hesitate?"

"I do not seek your life, Rafe Norris," replied Myrtle. "I only protect myself from wrong, and that I will do, no matter what happens. If you had taken me to your camp, I would have killed you with the first weapon I could reach."

"I would have risked that," was the reply. "But enough of this. I am conquered, and wish to know what you require of me."

"You have come back voluntarily, and you must remain a prisoner. Go into that room behind you."

"I will not."

"Go in; it is the only way to save your life."

At this moment the light of hope came into the eye of Rafe Norris. He had seen something which boded well for him.

"It is foolish to throw my life away," he said, quietly. "Since you insist upon it and will take my life if I refuse, I will go as your prisoner. I could not ask for a fairer jailer."

"Go in there; I have no time to waste in idle words."

He retreated slowly, still facing her, and speaking in the same careless tone which he had assumed lately.

"I never thought, my dear girl, that I should ever become your prisoner in this particular way. I did hope that at some time you would hold me in a willing and sweeter bondage—the bondage of those who love and are beloved again. I have not yet given up hope."

"You will force me to fire at you yet," she said, raising the carbine a little.

"Don't do it, my sweet; I don't like it, and it would be foolish to shed the blood of one who loves you to the confines of desperation. In fact, I yet indulge the hope that— Hurrah!"

Myrtle suddenly felt herself seized from behind and inclosed in a strong grasp, while the carbine was thrown into the air and went off without injury to any one. Slightly turning her head she saw the leering, evil face of the man called Velveteens close to hers.

"Ha, ha, ha, Rafe! You got it this time. The little cuss is p'izen—p'izen of the cussiest kind, ain't she?"

The man had crept up while she was engaged in parley with Norris, and seized her before she could turn. It was vain to struggle, and Myrtle allowed the carbine to be taken from her hand without a word of objection.

"Order your man Friday to take his hands off me," she said. "I am not used to such treatment as this."

"You deserve wuss," hissed Velvetens. "See yer', Rafe, ye'd better give her to me, an' ef I don't tame her then my hand is out, that's all!"

"Be quiet, Velvetens," was the reply. "This girl is mine, and I mean to make her my wife, so beware what you say or do. If I order the man to release you, will you promise not to get a weapon?"

"Yes," replied Myrtle. "I won't try to kill you again *to-day*, but I may *to-morrow*. What unmanly scoundrels you must be when it takes two of you to conquer one weak girl."

"A weak gal shoots mighty clust, an' throws pistols bully," said Velvetens, releasing her at a sign from Norris, but remaining between her and the door.

"I am somewhat like yourself, Mr. Norris," said Myrtle, quietly. "I yield to persuasion which I cannot resist. I suppose you wish me to go with you?"

"I have some slight wishes pointing in that direction," replied Rafe, mockingly.

"Then I will go. Will you allow me to get my hat, or must I go bareheaded?"

"Where is it?"

She pointed to the curtained alcove where she slept. He opened the curtains and looked in to satisfy himself that there was no door by which she could escape, and stepping back made a sign to her to pass in. She did so, and a moment later they heard a sharp, clicking, metallic sound, followed a moment later by another.

"By the Six Devils!" screamed Velvetens, "she's got hold of a rifle some'ers. Didn't ye hear her cock it?"

Both men sprung toward the recess, and drawing aside the curtains looked in, but to their rage and dismay, Myrtle was nowhere in sight.

Rafe Norris could not speak for passion. He ran to and fro in the little alcove, pounded the walls, shook the bed, and searched in places where a rat could hardly have taken refuge, with a dim idea that she *might* be there, but all in vain.

"It looks almost like a supernatural act," muttered Rafe below his breath. "Where *can* she have gone? I've a good mind to set fire to the cabin and take the chances of finding her."

"Let's do it," said Velvetens, eagerly.

"I believe you would, old fellow," said Rafe, laughing. "You don't seem to care much whether you kill or cure—but remember thet I *love* the girl."

"Love! oh, yes; that's a nice word for Rafe Norris to speak. But, it won't do to set a light to the cabin fur that would bring the "brigade" on us, right smart. We've got ter git out'n this place anyhow, before Old Pegs comes back. He'd make it hotter than hotness for us."

"I only wish he would come back," replied Rafe, grating his teeth. "Curse him, he has

been the cause of all our trouble. Now we won't be able to get those Indians into a square fight again, this season. They were whipped too bad, curse the luck."

As he spoke he gave the bed a kick. A clicking sound was heard and the floor seemed to rise beneath their feet, disclosing a cavity about four feet square and a flight of steps leading downward. "Hurrah!" cried Rafe. "We've got her after all. In with you!"

Velvetens sprung down the steps and ran through a narrow passage into a little cave scooped out of the solid earth where Myrtle stood with a rifle in her hand. She was again brought to bay.

CHAPTER X.

ON THE TRAIL—A TREACHEROUS ACT.

"Boys," said Old Pegs, "they've got her, ke'd or alive, and we've got to find out which—to resker her ef she's alive and to revenge her ef she's dead. Duz thet kind ov tork please you?"

The men did not speak, but he read in their eyes that they would be with him to the death. He beckoned them to follow, and entered the cabin, tearing down the curtain which concealed the recess in which Myrtle had slept. He caught hold of the bed and gave it a swing, and, turning as if upon a pivot it showed the opening and the steps leading downward.

"Two or three of you come with me," said Old Pegs. "I don't want too many; they'll spile the trail."

They ran down the steps and entered the little passage which led to the cave. The place was dark, but Old Pegs took a taper from the wall and lighted it.

"I called her and she didn't answer so I didn't stay to light up," he said. "Let's see what all this amounts to."

The moment the taper was lighted the men uttered cries of surprise, for there, close against the wall, lay the man called Velvetens, bathed in blood.

"I'll bet a thousand dollars the gal killed him," cried Old Pegs, as he turned the villain over on his back. "Thar's the mark of her bullet, but—thunder! He's got a knife in his breast."

It was true. A long knife had pierced the bosom of Velvetens, just above the collar-bone, and slanting downward. The rifle-ball had pierced him through the neck, but such a wound was not necessarily fatal, and the knife had finished the bloody work.

"The gal never done that," said one of the men. "Seems ter me thar's life in the low cuss, old man."

"Giv' us yer flask, then. Whisky'll bring this critter out of his grave a'most. He don't deserve it but I want ter question him a bit before he goes under."

The man handed over the flask, and Old Pegs bathed the lips of the wounded wretch with the strong liquor, and raising his head managed to get a little down his throat. A moment after he gave a gasp and his eyes flared open, gazing with a wild look upon the faces bent above him.

"Whar am I?" he gasped. "Oh, I know now; I've got my gruel."

"You ain't got long ter live, Velveteens," said Old Pegs. "and yer mou't ez well make a clean breast of it."

"I'll tell," he muttered. "Give me some more whisky—I want strength."

A few mouthfuls of the fiery liquor gave him life and he spoke more freely.

"Rafe Norris hez got her, curse him!"

"Whar is he?"

"Up among the foot-hills—by the Spirit Spring."

"Ho; thet's it, eh? Did the gal do this?"

"She shot me," gasped the dying man, "and Rafe—thought I'd die—and stabbed—me—the dog—let him die—a dog's—death! Curse him, dead or alive!"

As he spoke he caught the knife by the handle and drew it from the wound. A great gush of black blood followed, and Velveteens, the henchman of Rafe Norris who had done his evil work for many a year was dead.

"Tell yer what, boys," said Old Pegs, "this man wouldn't 'a' died ef he'd bin let alone. Thet shot through the neck wouldn't 'a' killed him by no means, but the dirty thief hed done with him and so finished him. Now, then, lift him up and we'll plant him outside. He ain't going ter stay hyar, ye know."

They lifted the limp and bleeding form and carried it up the steps into the open air. Little time was spent upon his burial; a shallow trench was dug in which they laid him in his blood, and heaped the fresh earth above him as quickly as they could.

"We'll go back to camp," said Old Pegs. "It'll take all the boys ter do this job, but they'll do it right smart. Come on."

They sprung into their saddles and rode back to the camp of the brigade, and the word passed from man to man that the outlaws had taken Myrtle, the beautiful child of the old hunter. Not a man in the brigade but had chivalry enough in his nature to peril his life for the girl, and they hailed with delight the order to march. Dave Farrell led them, a look of stern determination upon his handsome face.

An hour's march brought them to the foot-hills, at a point where the hand of Nature had hurled the rocks together in grand confusion, piling rock on rock, forming a grand barricade which it seemed impossible to scale. As they approached the dark defile which formed the only entrance to this gloomy place, Dave Farrell touched Old Pegs upon the arm:

"There is the scene of our first battle, old man," he said. "Rafe Norris is too old in mountain lore to leave such a place undefended. Call the men to a halt, Jim," he added aloud, speaking to his second in command.

He had scarcely spoken when a mounted man shot out of the dark defile, followed by another and another, until eight horsemen, mounted admirably and armed to the teeth, were seen to form under the rocky wall.

No time was wasted and no questions asked, for, as this body of men began to form, the trappers spread out to left and right and opened a telling fire upon them at the distance of three hundred yards. Massed as they were against a wall of gray rocks, upon which their forms stood out in bold relief, there was no such thing

as missing, and their men were dropping on every side under the murderous fire before they were ready for the charge and the command to advance rung out. The same command might have served for the brigade, for they closed in at the same moment, slung their rifles, drew their revolvers and charged!

An equal number of the most daring fighters, the best horsemen and best armed must make a terrible fray, and one or the other must break soon. It was the band of Rafe Norris which "could not stand the pressure," and after a bloody engagement of five minutes' duration, during which many a blow was given and taken and many revolvers emptied—not without effect—the broken band of Norris reeled backward and fled for the entrance of the ravine, with the men of the brigade upon their haunches. The deep glen swallowed them up, when, as if by magic, the entrance to the glen bristled with lances held by Indians, who well knew how to use them, forming an impenetrable obstacle to any further advance.

A single shout from Dave Farrell and his men broke to left and right, one-half led by Old Pegs and the other by himself, and making a circuit they met upon the spot where the battle had commenced.

"Hot work, boys!" said Dave, as he passed his hand across his heated brow. "If it had not been for those cursed lances we would have been on their cruppers yet, but no horsemen in the world could break through those lances as they are posted now; but we can drive them to."

"I'll take the job," said Old Pegs. "I only want ten men."

"Take them!" cried Dave shortly, "and when the pass is clear, signal us to advance."

Old Pegs picked out his men and rode away at a cracking pace, accompanied by two men to bring back the horses. In the mean time the British force were grouped in the rear of their Indian allies, ready to meet the attack should the enemy attempt to break through. What was their surprise to see the trappers dismount and begin to lounge about, just out of rifle-range, making no effort to advance.

"They've sent for help, I reckon," said a dark-browed, ruffianly-looking fellow who had command of the whites in the detachment who guarded the pass.

The position they occupied was a strange one. The pass was not more than twenty paces wide, bordered by perpendicular rocks twenty feet high without lateral passes on either side. No movement was made by the trappers, and their enemies did not care for another close grapple by daylight. An hour of inaction passed, and the ruffians began to gather courage and talk of another attack.

"Say," cried a voice overhead. "Won't you please go 'way frum hyar? I ask it on my knees."

They looked up and saw Old Pegs standing calmly on the summit of the rock, looking earnestly down at them.

"Won't you please go 'way?" he repeated. "We wanter come through this yer' pass, ourselves."

"Why don't you come, then?" demanded a

ruffian named Jim Diggs, restraining some of his companions who were about to fire on the old hunter.

"Acause you've got some chaps down thar with long poles, and the cattle kain't come through," replied Old Pegs.

"That's bad!" said Jim Diggs, "and they are a dreadful obstinate lot of men, too, and I'm afraid they'll want to stay whar they are."

"Can't we persuade 'em ter go 'way?" said Old Pegs.

"I'm afraid not, old man."

"I'll try what I kin do!" roared Old Pegs.

"Go to work, boys!"

The ravine was narrow, as we have said, and the sides very precipitous. The old man suddenly disappeared, and scarcely had he done so when the sky began to rain large stones about the size of a man's head, which came rattling down about the skulls of the enemy in a dreadfully unpleasant way, while nothing could be seen of the men who were throwing them, and who lurked far enough back of the verge to be out of range.

"Kain't we persuade yer?" yelled Old Pegs, as stone after stone came crashing down. "Oh, yes, we kin. Git up and dust, you scum of mortality! You children of evil, git!"

It was death to remain, for, hemmed in that narrow pass, while the rocks continued to come down like rain upon their heads, four men already lay dead, and others were severely wounded, while the mocking laughter of the trappers, perched upon the rocks, rung in their ears. Worst of all, they could not see their assailants, who prudently kept out of reach while they continued to send the stones flying over into the pass.

There was nothing for it except retreat, for no man could live long under that terrible avalanche. There seemed to be no lack of ammunition, for the hail-storm increased instead of diminishing. Having done all that men could do, they retreated, and Old Pegs signaled the trappers from the top of the rocks. They at once threw themselves into the saddle and came on at a mad gallop. As the Hudson Bay men showed a disposition to return, those on the rocks took their rifles and gave them two withering volleys, which quickly sent them back into the valley beyond. Running along the crest of the ravine at the head of his men, Old Pegs gained a position from which he could guard the advance of his friends at little hazard to himself. The enemy were now hastily retreating across the valley, moving toward a dark pass two or three miles distant, where they proposed to make another stand. Old Pegs rapidly descended the rocks and joined his friends, as they debouched from the ravine, with Dave Farrell at their head.

"Well done, Old True Blue!" he said. "That trick saved us twenty men, at least."

"We hain't got men to spare, either," replied Old Pegs. "Them devils kin fight, and you bet yer life they *will* fight, too, cuss 'em. Thet pass they ar' gittin' inter now is mighty strong."

"Can't we turn it, as we did the last?"

"Ska'cely! They won't be sech durned fools this time, and we may kalkilate on finding some of the'r men roosting on the sides of the ravine,

ef we play thet game. 'Sides thet, the pass is wider, and they could keep away from the stun's."

"Then we must a'tack them in front," said Dave, quietly. "I'll back my boys to do the work clean."

"I guess we kin do better'n thet," replied the old hunter. "Whar's my boss? What wuz it old Solomon said 'bout a beggar on hossback, eh? I'm one ov them chaps myself, jest now, but I feel more at hum. Hold on; what d'ye say ef I go out and hev a talk with them critters?"

"It might do some good, but I doubt it," replied Dave.

"I guess I'll try it. They hev hed a right smart chainece ter know what kind of stuff we ar' made of, and mebbe they've got enuff. Anyhow, I kin only try it. Whar's got a han'kercher? Don't all speak ter onc't, 'cause I knows yer don't blow yer noses onc't a week. Not thet one, Granny; they'll think it's a black flag and shoot at me. No, Pipes, old boy; they'd kick on thet, too; they'll think it's a battle flag, full ov holes. Hyar's one will do."

He took the handkerchief which Dave presented, fastened it on a ramrod and rode away toward the pass. At first the Indians showed a disposition to fire at him, but at a word from the man who acted as leader of the whites, Jim Diggs, they lowered their weapons, and the leader stepped a few paces to the front and waited for the coming of the hunter, who rode on, shaking out his hastily-improvised flag.

"Hullo, Jim," he said, coolly. "Durn my cats ef I've seen ye sence the day Captain Burns hed ye bosswhipped out'n Laramie fur stealing his blankets. I'm mighty glad ter see ye."

"Play yer game a little more keerful, old man," said Diggs, playing with the butt of his revolver. "I kain't ante or foller suit when ye lead that way."

"Pass it, then," replied Old Pegs; "but don't try ter skeer me by laying hands on a weepen, or I'll come down on yer like a roaring lion and devour ye, body and bones. I'm might hungry, anyhow."

"This ain't business," replied Diggs, seeing that bravado was of no avail. "What d'ye mean by pitching inter us, this way?"

"Jimmy—Jimmy Diggs!" said Old Pegs, "whatever ye do, play fa'r. Didn't you try to wipe us out, over north, night afore last?"

"I guess you've made a mistake, old man. We don't seek to harm no one."

"No more Velveteens didn't, nor yet Rafe Norris, eh? Come, Jim, don't be so cussid foolish. Whar's my gal?"

"Your gal! I dunno what ye mean; we hain't got no gal, ez I knows on."

"Mebbe I'd better ask yer another question. Whar's Rafe Norris?"

"Dunno any such person," replied Jim Diggs, quietly.

"You don't?"

"No sirree; ain't no sech person in this yer camp, nor yet no Velveteens. I guess you've barked up the wrong tree, boss."

"It seems as ef we didn't understand one another's game," said Old Pegs, frowning. "Now look yer: I want to know whar Rafe Norris is—the man that stole my gal. You know who I

mean durned well, you cussid skunk, and you'd better tell me now while I keep my temper."

"Don't know any Rafe Norris."

"Whar is Curly-headed Ned, then? Does thet seem ter suit yer complaint?"

Jim Diggs started and turned pale, as the old hunter pronounced that name. It told him that he was not to be deceived, and that he knew well the character of Rafe Norris.

"You size my pile, Old Pegs," said Diggs, quietly. "I know *that* name well enough, and I kin find him mighty easy."

"Find him, then."

Diggs turned about and whistled, and a man showed himself at the mouth of the pass.

"The capt'in," cried Diggs. "Say Old Pegs wants ter see him."

The man disappeared, and ten minutes later a man rode out of the pass, at sight of whom Old Pegs loosened his revolver in his belt, while an ominous look passed over his face. It was Rafe Norris, clad in a half-Indian garb, with a plumed head-dress flaunting the eagle-feather of a chief. There was a look of reckless daring on his face as he dashed up.

"Ho, Old Pegs," he said. "My worthy father-in-law that is to be, I greet you. To what may I ascribe the honor of this meeting?"

"Don't chaff any more then you kin help, Rafe, acause I ain't in the right temper ter b'ar it. You lying skunk, whar is my gal, Myrtle?"

"Safe enough, my dear sir, safe enough," replied Rafe. "I have come to the conclusion that you are not the right person to take charge of a beautiful girl like Myrtle, and so I have taken her off your hands. You ought to be thankful for it."

"I want that gal, Rafe Norris."

"So do I!" replied Norris, calmly. "Let us understand one another, my good old friend. I love that girl and intend to make her my wife. I love her so well that nothing earthly can turn me from my purpose. I have another reason, too, which I will not tell you now."

"You'd ruther die, eh?" cried Old Pegs, in a tone of deadly fury. "Then stand out thar like a man, take yer rifle and fight it out."

"Thanks," replied Rafe. "I'd much prefer not to do that. But, don't you want to see your child?"

"Yes," replied Old Pegs.

"You shall. Now, Jim! Down with him."

And regardless of the flag, the two men threw themselves upon Old Pegs and attempted to bear him to the earth.

CHAPTER XI.

THE HEROINE A CAPTIVE.

THIS cowardly act, while it was a surprise to Old Pegs, did not find him utterly unprepared. He suffered himself to slip from the saddle, and in doing so, dragged his two assailants with him, each encircled by one of his powerful arms. Once upon the ground they realized that it was not an easy work which they had undertaken, for those great arms enfolded them with a grip which literally drove the breath from their bodies, strong men as they were. A moment more and Jim Diggs was down with the huge foot of the hunter planted on his breast, while above him stood the stalwart old man with

Rafe Norris in his grasp, shaking him until it seemed as if he would tear him limb from limb.

"Turn on a flag, would yer?" hissed the old man. "I orter kill yer—I orter cut yer heart out, by Jinks; why shouldn't I?"

Rafe made frantic efforts to get at a weapon, but his efforts were vain, and Jim Diggs was utterly powerless under the pressure of that heavy foot. The outlaws in the pass, seeing the terrible danger of their leaders, advanced at a wild gallop, while a party of the trappers about equal in numbers, charged in return. But, before they could reach the combatants Old Pegs was standing alone in a sea of tossing steel, set upon at once by twenty foes. His wild whoop of defiance rung out above the tumult and a terrible commotion was made in their midst. Horses careered away riderless, shouts of wild rage were heard, and out of the tempest of steel rode Old Pegs, whirling above his head the rifle which served him for a mace. More than one Indian cabin was empty, from that hour, for the warriors would never more return from the battle or the chase.

"Yah—hip!" yelled Old Pegs, as he still struck right and left. "Old Pegs is thar, every time. Whoop! Sock it to 'em, boys; give 'em Bunker Hill!"

His friends are hardly a hundred paces away, when the brave old hunter dropped his hands to his side attacked by an unlooked-for weapon, and one against which he had not time to guard, the lasso! He feels the deadly noose settle over his shoulders and tighten about his arms, still another and another follows—and he is dragged from the saddle into the center of his enemies, who, satisfied with what they have done, turn their horses' heads and fly, bearing the hunter in their midst. Close upon the crupper, dropping a man at almost every stride, ride the bold trappers, so close indeed that they sweep into the pass with the pursued so near that they can not turn and defend themselves. Man after man falls and still they press on.

"Keep up the pace, boys!" screamed Dave, wild with the delight of battle. "Down with the cut-throats."

Rafe Norris heard his voice and made a half-turn in his saddle with a revolver in his hand. Without checking his horse in the least he fired and the bullet passed through Farrell's cap, absolutely cutting a track through his thick hair, so close a shave was it. Dave returned the fire quickly, but a man who happened to swerve a little from his course received the bullet and fell with a hoarse cry of agony, stricken through the collar-bone.

But this pace could not last forever, and the outlaws burst out of the pass in advance and were half-way across the level valley which lay in front when the headmost trapper rode out of the pass. Here there was room to turn, and Rafe Norris was the man to take advantage of it. Forty of his bravest men wheeled out and joined him and they formed a line to protect the retreat of the rest, held the trappers in check for five minutes and then fell back slowly, their faces ever turned to the foe and their rifles playing upon scattered files. In this order the rear guard disappeared in the

next pass, leaving the trappers in the valley, a place of small extent with a narrow strip of timber crossing it from side to side. Under the shadow of this timber Dave called his men to a halt, to breathe the horses which had been severely blown in the desperate chase.

"We have lost a good man, boys," he said, raising his cap reverently, "for these villains will murder him beyond a doubt. Taken while bearing a white flag! By Heaven, the Sioux alone would not have been guilty of a breach of faith like that. What are we to do now we have lost our guide?"

"I know the passes well enough, Cap," replied one of the men, "but upon my word we've got heavy work before us. They can hold that pass against us for twenty years."

"We'll try it, however," replied Dave. "At best we can only fail and I for one have given my life to the cause."

Old Pegs was a prisoner in the hands of a foe as relentless as death, a man who respected nothing, not even the sanctity of a flag. The lassoes had not been removed from his arms but he was lifted bodily into the saddle of a man who had fallen under the sweep of his powerful arm, while on one side rode Jim Diggs and on the other a man equally cruel, holding a revolver ready for a shot.

They entered the pass in safety and were quickly followed by the rear guard. Rafe Norris came last and leaped from his horse quickly.

"Lances to the front," he cried. "Joe Beaver, take ten men up the east side of the pass and don't let any one come up. Boston Jake, take the same number of men up the west side with the same instructions. If you had done this before, Jim, you would have saved some men."

"I know it, now," said Diggs. "D'ye want to save this prisoner? He ain't wuth much to keep."

"I have not fully made up my mind," replied Rafe Norris.

"Shoot me, why don't you?" cried Old Pegs. "You shot the Indian and Velveteens, good friends of yours, and why not Old Pegs?"

"Dog!" hissed Rafe Norris. "You don't know how near to death you are at this moment. Breathe a word of that kind again and you are a dead man."

"I don't keer much how soon I go under," was the undaunted reply, "but I don't believe even your men would stand a murder like that. Why don't you try it?"

"'Twon't do, Cap," whispered Diggs, with a side glance at the men. "Thar's over twenty of our boys gone under, and some of 'em ar' alive, probably. If we kill him now thar ain't no chance fer them."

"See that he does not escape, that is all. If he does your life will answer for it. I am satisfied that, without him for a guide, the devils can't get at us, and our taking him was a sore stroke to them. I am going up to see my intended bride, Old Pegs."

Rafe Norris laughed scornfully, leaped into the saddle and rode away swiftly up the pass, which ended in a sort of amphitheater, hemmed

in by giant rocks, an approach to which by anything except the opening by which he had entered seemed almost impossible. Six men were in the place, seated upon a flat rock, four of them engaged in a little game of "draw poker," and the fifth looking on, deeply interested. A little way off, Myrtle sat upon a stone, and a stalwart man watching her closely. Her countenance was downcast, and she did not look up when Rafe Norris rode into the glade and dismounted. The players suspended operations, and looked at their leader in some doubt.

"Away with those painted darlings," he cried. "Your business was to watch the prisoner, not to play poker. We are beset by this accursed Brigade, and it is impossible to say whether we will ever escape. Over twenty of the boys have gone under, but we'll hold the pass now, no matter what happens, until the last man drops."

He left them, and advanced hurriedly to the side of Myrtle, making a signal to the guard that he might go. The fellow seemed glad to be released, and walked hastily away, while Rafe took a seat upon a stone close to Myrtle.

"How have you passed the hours of my absence, darling?" he said, in his blandest tone. "I hope you have not grieved that I did not return sooner."

"My deepest grief was in the thought that you *would* come back sooner or later," was the reply. "It cannot last long, for your master will surely claim his own soon."

"My master? Oh! you refer to the Supreme Master of the realms below," replied Rafe, with a light laugh. "Have no fears, my sweet one. He never interferes with those who are doing his work on earth, if he can possibly avoid it. I came to bring you a little news."

"You can bring me none that will please me," was the cool reply, unless it is that the day of your hanging is appointed."

"You will go too far, my girl," he said, knitting his dark brows. "I warn you to be careful, for, although I am a man who can bear much from one I love, my temper is not one of the sweetest at all times. Do you know that your father is in my hands?"

She started and looked at him wildly. She had hoped for much at the hands of Old Pegs, and if he were indeed taken, her hope was vain.

"I can hardly believe that you speak the truth," she said. "By what treachery has he fallen into your hands? He never was taken by fair means."

"It matters little," was the reply, "as long as I have him safe—and intend to make him the means of extorting a promise from you which I know you will not break. Hal! your friends are getting impatient, but my boys will teach them that it is not good to rouse the lion in his lair."

The battle had recommenced in the pass beyond.

"Now, hear me," he continued, "and be careful of your answers. When we have beaten off your friends, the trappers, we take our march for Fort Garry, as we have done our work here for the present. I am rich now, and will turn my back forever on the mountains and plains of the West, and lead a new life in the region of the tropics. There our lives will pass as a summer idyl, peaceful and calm, and we will forget that

this life of ours has ever been. There is a chaplain at Fort Garry who will marry us—"

"Never!"

"Hear me out. Give me your promise to go with me, and no harm shall come to him you call your father. I know that it is false—that he is not your father, but that is nothing now. Refuse, and he shall die with the utmost refinement of savage torment."

"You would not do that?" she gasped.

"I? Oh, no, that is not my business, but you must understand that the Modoc Sioux—my allies—have lost many friends, and they claim a victim. And, in short, I shall consider myself bound to give them one if you are obdurate. What do you say?"

"I must see my father."

"Oh, no; I know that the old knave would only strengthen you in your obstinacy, and that would not pay. Without seeing him, you must either accept or refuse."

"You say that the Modoc Sioux demand a victim. Let it be so, then, for I will not see my father perish."

"Do you accept?" he cried, eagerly, for he knew that she would keep a promise once made, if it broke her heart.

"You misunderstand me, sir. What I propose is this: let the Sioux have their victim *in me*, and let that brave old man go free."

"You—you!" he stammered. "Saints of mercy, what do you take me for?"

"I owe a happy life to Nicholas Fletcher, him you know as Old Pegs. Even in this wild region, he has made me happy for twenty years. Nothing which he could do has been wanting, and I owe him so much that I am ready to give up my life for his sake."

At this moment a rattling volley was heard at the entrance of the valley, followed by wild yells of savage vengeance. The fire was returned, but as Rafe Norris listened breathlessly he knew that his men were falling back. What could it mean? Why had they been so suddenly ousted from their strong position by a force not nearly as large as their own?

CHAPTER XII.

DROPPING THE MASK.

WHILE Dave Farrell was deploying his forces for an attack upon the pass, he heard behind him the rattle of advancing hoofs, and quickly drew his men back into the shelter of the trees, for it might be an enemy. But, to his delight, the first man who rode out of the pass was Whirlwind, the Blackfoot, and behind him a hundred picked men of his nation. They had followed the outlaws after the repulse at the trapper camp, and attacked their rear, but they had taken shelter in one of the passes and had driven the Indians back. But, hearing the sound of the combat, Whirlwind, who was on his way to join his forces with those of Dave Farrell, at once turned back and now came on eager for the fray.

The reinforcement was needed, for the trappers were somewhat worn by the battles and skirmishes of the day. Dave rode out to meet the chief and greeted him warmly.

"My brother has fought well," said the warrior, reproachfully; "but, why did he not wait

for the Blackfeet, who seek revenge upon the Modoc Sioux and their friends?"

"We did not know where you were, chief," replied Dave; "but we'll give you fighting enough before we have done with this business, that I tell you. There is the enemy, but if you join us, you must fight as I tell you."

"Whirlwind is not ashamed to fight under the Beaver Captain," replied the chief. "He will listen to the words of wisdom."

"Dismount your men and picket the horses here behind the woods. Five men will do to guard them."

The order was promptly obeyed, and the Blackfeet advanced on foot.

"We are here," cried Whirlwind. "Let the Beaver Captain tell us what to do, and we are ready."

"Good!" replied Dave, adopting the laconic manner of the Indians. "Remember that Short Legs is a prisoner among our enemies, and be careful to do him no harm. Speak to your men and tell them this."

The chief did so, and then drawing him aside, Dave gave him instructions how to proceed. His plan was to separate the Indians and send them up the hills to drive out the two parties detached by Rafe Norris to guard the flanks of his forces, and then assail them from the cliff, while the trappers attacked the front.

The Indian, pleased with the duty assigned him, quickly separated his men, placing one-half under the command of a man whom he could trust, and then, keeping under cover of the strip of woods, marched to the right and left until they reached the confines of the valley, and began to steal up through the dark defiles, climbing from rock to rock, toward the place where the flanking-parties lay.

It was some time before these men understood the movement, but when they did so, everything was done which men could do to make their position good. But the savages, sheltering themselves in every conceivable way, gradually closed in until scarcely a hundred yards separated them, when they rose from the cover and rushed in with hatchet and knife to do the work assigned them. A desperate struggle followed, hand-to-hand and foot-to-foot; but numbers triumphed, and of the twenty-two men who had been appointed to guard the flanks, only eight, and three of these wounded, reached the level where their comrades stood.

These had their hands full, for the trappers were advancing, firing as they ran, and a large party had already effected a lodgment among the scattered boulders which lay about the mouth of the pass, while the Blackfeet were raining down every possible missile on the heads of the astounded British.

The Sioux, unable to stand the attack, were falling back in confusion, with great loss, and the whites opened to permit them to pass through, while they closed in sullenly to cover the retreat. Sadly thinned in numbers, the band showed a gallant front still, and walked calmly back, pausing now and then to take a shot at the Blackfeet on the rocks, who showed themselves at times, shaking the scalps they had taken in the air, and waking the echoes with their shouts of triumph.

"Look hyar; some one is going to git hurt if this goes on. 'You'd better let me loose," Old Pegs said.

"I'll see you skulped first," roared Jim Diggs.

"Good-by, then," replied Old Pegs, tauntingly, as he flung himself out of the saddle suddenly and sprung into a deep fissure which ran close beside the road. "I'm off!"

"Shoot him, durn ye, shoot!" yelled Diggs, as he emptied his revolver into the fissure up which the old hunter was climbing, his form scarcely distinguishable. A volley rattled upward, and Old Pegs, who had reached a ledge at least twenty feet above them, threw up his hands and fell upon the ledge out of sight.

"Done fur!" said Jim, coolly. "He *would* hev it, ye see. Jump up thar, Boston Jake, and lift his ha'r."

The man was about to obey, but at this moment the trappers burst in upon them, and Boston Jake was forced to go with the rest, and in some haste, for the bullets of the trappers, "deadly aimed and hot," rattled through the crowded ranks. The slow retreat turned almost to a rout, long before they reached the mouth of the ravine, but at this moment, wild-eyed and savage, Rafe Norris broke away through the ranks of his own men and reached the front.

"Turn, curse you, turn!" he screamed, striking one of his own men a furious blow, which brought him to the ground. "Turn, cowards and dogs! Never let it be said that you fled from such as these."

There was certainly personal magnetism about this man, for those who were to all outward seeming beaten beyond recall, turned at his slightest word, and for a moment bore back the rushing tide of the trappers. But the Blackfeet, creeping from ledge to ledge, again reached a place from which they could rain destruction on the heads of their enemies, who were again forced to retire, but sullenly, contesting every foot of ground.

"That cursed Blackfoot has ruined us, Jim," groaned Rafe, looking up at the cliffs. "But for him they never could have broken through."

"The boys fought like devils, I tell ye," said Jim Diggs. "Oh, I forgot to tell ye that 'Old Pegs' tried to leg it and we had to pop him over."

"Let him go," replied Rafe, quietly. "If it had been Dave Farrell I would have felt better, and yet the old man has done me wrong. Look out!"

A great rock hurled from the hand of Whirlwind, struck Jim Diggs on the head and brought him to the earth with a hollow groan, while a wild triumphant yell pealed up from the throat of Whirlwind as he noted the result of the throw. The last and most unscrupulous of the lieutenants of Rafe Norris had gone to his last home. Rafe shook his clinched hand at the Indians on the cliff, and ordered his men to fall back to the mouth of the pass which opened into the Spirit Spring Valley, resolved to hold it to the last.

The Modoc Sioux, greatly thinned by the battles of the last two weeks, sullenly took their stations behind the boulders, ready to die in their tracks if need be. The whites looked over their cartridges, saw to it that every weapon

was in order, and stood ready to obey the commands of their chief.

"I'd like to revenge myself on them, boys," hissed Rafe Norris. "If it did not look like deserting you, I have a way yet if it would suit you."

"Let's hear it, Cap," said Boston Jake. "We'll do any thing for you."

"I don't doubt it, Jake. Come with me and I'll tell you my plan."

The two stood in close conference for a moment and then Jake passed to and fro among the men, telling them what the captain meant to do and they agreed to it at once. Then leaving them to keep off the forces of Dave Farrell as long as possible, Norris stepped hastily to the side of Myrtle.

"Come, my darling," he said, mockingly. "It is time that we were on the way."

"I am not going anywhere with you," was the answer.

"I have no time to waste. Will you go with me quietly or shall I call some of the Indians to carry you? They are not very courteous knights, and perhaps—"

"I will go with you," she said, quickly, "but woe to you if you cherish any evil thought against me, for with the first weapon I can reach I will kill you."

He made no answer but took her hand and led her at a rapid pace up the little valley until he reached the south end. Two Indians bearing a number of new lariats accompanied them and they stopped at the base of the almost perpendicular cliff and began to climb like cats until they reached a ledge fifty feet above the canyon. Then they sent down the ends of a doubled lariat which was formed into a sort of chair at the bottom, and at a sign from Rafe, Myrtle took her place in it and was raised to the ledge above. The rope was lowered again and Rafe came up, hand over hand, and reached the ledge panting for breath. The Indians slid down the lariats, which Rafe flung down to them and the two departed, leaving Rafe and Myrtle standing on the ledge.

"It will trouble your good friends to follow us here," said Rafe, laughing. "Capital scouts they may be but I doubt if they could track us up this cliff."

"You will find it hard to deceive my father," she replied, "if he once takes your trail."

"I don't think he will trouble me any more," replied Rafe, with a grim smile, turning away his head. "Your father was a plucky and keen-witted man, but it is out of his power to harm me now."

"Have you murdered him?" she gasped, looking at him wildly.

"I am not a murderer," was the calm answer. "He tried to escape from my men while I was basking in the sunlight of your smiles, and got hit. That is all I know about it."

"I will remember how it was done," cried Myrtle, with a lurid gleam in her beautiful eyes. "But I will speak to you no more until the time comes for you to die."

He took her hand again and led her by wild paths across the mountain, until she was nearly ready to sink from fatigue. When he saw that she was tired, he stopped and pulled moss from

the rocks, which he spread to make her a couch.

"Do not fear me," he said, as she seemed to shrink from his touch. "I would not do you a wrong, for I worship the ground your feet have trod."

"It may be so," she said, quietly. "Let us say that you really love me, then. But, do you not take a strange way of showing it?"

"I will change all that," he cried. "Look you, Myrtle Forrester—you start at the name, do you?—I will show you that I know more of you than you suppose. On the fourteenth of June, twelve years ago, a train was run into by Sioux on the plain toward the Three Buttes. It was supposed that every person was killed, but as it turned out, an old prairie-man, known as Old Pegs, was some miles from camp, having in charge a child six years of age, the daughter of an Indian agent named Forrester, who was going to Bent's Fort. These two were all who escaped, and Old Pegs came back to find the camp in ruins, and every man and woman killed and scalped."

"You know all this? Will you tell me how it came to *your* knowledge?"

"No matter; I know that it is true and so do you. Forrester was not quite dead, and after leaving his daughter to the care of Old Pegs, with an injunction to guard her as his life, Forrester died. Old Pegs kept his word, and Myrtle Forrester is now my prisoner, and destined soon to be my wife."

"Why have you told my story to me here?"

"That you may know that I am not entirely unacquainted with your history, and I knew who and where you were before I came to the Indian country. Myrtle, I came to find you and win your love!"

"You came here for that," she cried, with dilating eyes. "Who and what are you, then?"

"Rafe Norris, at your service! Curly-headed Ned, so called at the forts upon Hudson Bay; and Edward Forrester within the realms of civilization. But come—have you rested enough?"

She rose at once and followed him, but the name which he had given last troubled her. "Curly-headed Ned," she knew by report, as a chief over one section of the Modoc Sioux, and a man whose name was stained by a hundred crimes. But, why did he lay claim to the name of Forrester?

"I see that you are puzzled," he said, with a smile. "I am afraid that you doubt that the name of Forrester is really mine. Is it not so?"

"I can not see why you claim it."

"Because it is my right name. I have the honor to be your cousin, my dear girl, and this will in some sort account for the affection which I bear you."

"You claim kindred with me, and yet seek to wrong me in the basest manner. There—I believe that it is all false, and—Where are you taking me? I have been in this pass before."

He smiled in a superior sort of way, and turning a sharp angle, stepped suddenly into the path down which she had forced Velveteens on the day when she made him prisoner. Her captor

was taking her to her former home! A great fear came into her heart, for she knew that he would not dare to bring her to the cabin of Old Pegs unless that brave man had ceased to breathe.

CHAPTER XIII.

A DREADFUL ORDEAL—FINIS.

BOSTON JAKE and his men did not resist very long after the departure of Rafe Norris. They stood out long enough to give a good excuse for yielding, and then sent out a flag to sue for peace. The Sioux would not trust to that, but took to the mountain at once, and sought to find their way back to their own country in small parties. Boston Jake surrendered his party in person, and Dave received his submission.

"Where is the man who was captured while carrying a flag?" he demanded. "You know well whom I mean."

"Yes—I know well enough, boss, but he's pegged out. Jim Diggs shot him on the jump, trying to escape."

"I shall hang three of your men for the murder," replied Dave, quietly, "and they will be selected by lot."

"That ain't according to Hoyle, boss," said Boston Jake. "I kain't see that play of yours, after we guv up."

"He was taken with a white flag in his hand."

"It were cussid mean, I know," replied Jake; "but it ain't right to do evil acause some one else did, eh?"

"Enough; where is Rafe Norris, better known as Curly headed Ned?"

"Curly? Why, he went away, two hours ago."

"The scoundrel! It will go hard with him when we once lay hands on him. Where is the daughter of Old Pegs? Tell me quickly before I put a bullet through your head."

"You needn't rare up that ar' way," said Boston Jake, sullenly. "I don't keer two cents what you do with me, and I don't skeer at all. That's the way I talk it. Curly-headed Ned hez got the gal."

The forces of Whirlwind satisfied that their sworn enemies—the Sioux—were scattered in the mountains, at once set out in pursuit, breaking up into squads of ten or less for that purpose. Woe to the Modoc Sioux whom they ran down. His scalp quickly adorned the belt of some son of the Blackfoot tribe, and hung afterward in the smoke of his lodge. The prisoners were quickly bound, and leaving ten men as a guard the rest of the trappers began to search for the trail of Rafe Norris. But they missed the keen eyes and subtle skill of Old Pegs, the man who could read in rocks and soil the slightest pressure of the human foot, and the search for a long time was vain, and Dave Farrell began to despair of success. They could find no trail.

In the mean time, Myrtle was a prisoner in the hands of Rafe Norris. He rapidly descended the slope which led to the hunter's cabin, holding her by the hand, and led her in at the open door of her former home.

"Here we are, my dear," he said quietly. "You see that it becomes my province to make you welcome to the home wick was once yours."

Do not mistake me, sweet girl. I will do you no wrong, unless it is wicked in me to wish to make you my wife."

"It is more than wicked—it is cruel and unmanly. Oh, if my hands could reach a weapon your life would be short."

"Doubtless you are right, Myrtle," he said, mournfully. "You would slay one who stands ready to lay down his life in your service, and who is willing to devote that life to make you happy. Can I say nothing to make you change your purpose, my darling?"

"Can you bring the dead to life? Will you be able to call Nicholas Fletcher from the bloody grave your hounds have given him? Oh, how base I should be if I ever forgot or forgave this crowning crime!"

"Enough," he cried, harshly. "I see that good words are but thrown away upon you, and that harsh measures are necessary. Hold out your hands; I must bind you or you will attempt to escape."

She put out her hands as if to comply, but as he stooped to take up the buckskin thong from the table, she bounded past him, and the sharp click announced that she had opened the trap beneath the bed. Before he could reach it the second click announced that it was closed again. Furious with passion he tugged at the light couch, and literally tore it from its position, but the trap remained firm in its place and all his efforts could not move it in the least. Dashing out into the next room he caught up a heavy ax and darted back.

The boards flew asunder under his furious strokes, and in an inconceivably short space of time he had made an opening large enough to permit him to descend. As he was about to step upon the stairs he heard Myrtle's clear voice.

"For your life—stand back!"

He looked once—and obeyed! She was standing in the little passage, holding a lighted taper in her hand. Just in front of her stood a small keg of powder with the head knocked out, and as he saw her pale, determined face by the light of the taper, he knew that she would destroy herself sooner than fall into his hands again.

"Mad woman," he screamed. "What would you do?"

"You can find out readily by coming down," was the quiet reply. "If you set your foot upon that step again it is the signal for your death."

"And yours—also!"

"And mine. I think that I should be doing good service in killing you even though I lose my life."

The man hesitated and stepped back into the room with a look of absolute terror on his face. He had not lied when he said that he loved her dearly, and it was terrible to him to think that she hated him so much that she would sooner die than be his wife. He tried persuasion, but to that she would not answer, standing statue-like, holding the taper in her unshaking hand.

"What good can it do you?" he said. "You must yield in time."

"If I feel that I am growing weak," she replied, "at that moment I will fire the powder. At the least I shall go to my Maker pure, and send you to your Judge at the same moment. From this time I will not answer you a word."

She drew a block close to the side of the keg and sat down with a bundle of tapers by her side. The one she held burned low, and she lighted another and waited as calmly as before, while above her the hungry eyes of Rafe Norris looked down at the prize he could not reach. He hoped that she would sleep, but the peculiar brightness of her eyes convinced him that it was impossible. Only fatigue, hunger or thirst could overcome her, and she had sworn that when that time came she would fire the train.

Twice he called to her as the hours passed on, but neither by sign, word or look did she show that she knew any thing of his presence, although her eyes never left the opening in the floor. In his madness he revolved in his mind a thousand plans to get her away from the powder if but for a moment, but it was useless; none of his plans were feasible while he could not draw from her a single look or sign of recognition. He felt that he could not bear this suspense much longer, but it must be borne. Hour after hour crept on. The tapers burned out, one by one, and as the first gray streaks of the morning light showed themselves in the east she took up the *last taper* and calmly lighted it.

"Ha! ha! ha!" he cried, exultantly; "your lights are gone. In a moment I shall have you in my power."

She spoke now for the first time since she had sealed her lips.

"It will burn for an hour," she said. "I will spend that hour in praying to God to take me in mercy to his rest, and when the taper burns low I will fire the powder."

"You dare not, girl," he hissed. "It is murder. You cannot destroy yourself in that cruel way. Oh, heaven, what shall I do? I will give you up—do you hear? I will give you up."

"I cannot trust you. If I throw away the taper, you will treat your word as you did when my guardian fell into your hands."

"I will not—I swear by everything I hold holy and pure. I will go away and never come back if you will throw away the taper. I swear it, on my soul."

"Swear by something else. I will not trust you. Keep silent, base man, and let me at least spend my last hour in quiet."

"You shall not do it," he screamed. "Here are my weapons, and I have no others—my revolvers. Take them, and then you can surely consider yourself safe."

"If you do that, I may put some trust in your promises, for I shall be able to enforce obedience."

He hesitated for a moment, but as she advanced the light in the direction of the keg, he took the weapons from his belt and threw them down to her. Shifting the taper into her left hand, she caught up a weapon and glanced at it, her quick look assuring her that it was ready for service, and she sprang to her feet, hastily hurling away the taper which was burned half-way down.

"Go outside," she said, "and let me see your face at the window of my room."

He hurried out at once, and looking up through the trap she caught sight of his pale face peering through the little window. In an instant she was out of the passage and at the

door, holding her revolvers cocked in each hand.

"It is over now, Rafe Norris," she said. "Go, before I forget myself and avenge in your person my murdered friend—my more than father, Nicholas Fletcher."

But he folded his arms and looked at her fixedly, the light of a strange resolve in his eyes.

"You think you have conquered," he said, "because I have given up my weapons. But not yet, my dear—not yet. I swear that you shall either kill me where I stand or go with me."

He made a step in advance, and she brought down her right-hand pistol with a stern, decided movement. Thus they stood at bay, each looking into the eyes of the other.

"If you miss!" he hissed, speaking through his set teeth.

"I shall *not* miss," was the stern reply. "Beware what you do."

He was doubling himself for a spring, when a calm voice said:

"Hold on! I meander in and take a hand."

Myrtle turned with a wild cry of delight. Old Pegs in the body, to all appearance sound in every part, stood before her.

"Come hyar while I hug yer!" cried the old man, with a suspicious catch in his voice. "Rafe Norris, I'll attend to *you*, right soon, I will."

He passed his strong arm about the slender form of Myrtle, and pressed his lips to her fair cheek.

"Give them yer' playthings to me, darlin'," he said, taking the revolvers from her. "I ain't got ne'er a weepin. Now look hyar, Rafe Norris, Curly-headed Ned, Sarpint—whatever yer name is, you've got ter fight me."

"I am willing," he cried, anxiously. "I'll fight you in any way you name."

"Wait; I wanter leave the gal safe in case I go under. I don't wanter, but then I mou't. Whar's yer carbine, Myrtle?"

"In the cabin."

"Git it and put a new charge in. You've got ter boss this scrimmage, you understand, and see fa'r play."

Myrtle knew the determined character of the old hunter well, and that it was useless to oppose him. She hurried into the house and brought out her carbine, discharged it and put in a new load. When she had loaded, Old Pegs turned to Norris.

"We'll stand off at about twenty paces and begin, ef you hev no objections. Thar's a shooter."

He tossed one of the revolvers to Rafe, who snatched it up eagerly.

"Ef I go under, gal, take to ther foothills, and don't come out till you find Dave or some of the boys. Now we'll stand back to back, walk ten paces and wheel when you give the word. After that let the best man win, but ef one of us tries to turn till you *do* give the word—send fur him, thet's all."

"I'll do it," replied Myrtle, quietly, "and you may be sure I will not miss. Get ready."

The men placed themselves back to back.

"March," she said.

They advanced ten paces each.

"Ready—turn!"

The pistols exploded at the same moment. Old Pegs staggered a little, but quickly recovered himself and fired again. Rafe Norris spun round upon his heel, uttered a short, quick cry and fell upon his back while the revolver dropped out of his hand. They ran to raise him and he made a feeble effort to lift his weapon but his hand refused its office and dropped to his side.

"I'm done for," he groaned, "and it served me right for all my villainy. Old Pegs, open my coat and take out the paper you will find there."

Old Pegs obeyed and found two or three letters and a legal document.

"I told you the truth, Myrtle, when I said I was your cousin. That paper is a copy of our grandfather's will which you will find in the hands of Justin Lawrence, attorney, at St. Louis. When you read the will you will understand why I wished to make you my wife. Never fear for me; I'll die as I have lived—game to the last. Here's luck to the Hudson Bay!"

He shook his hand above his head and with the effort his life went out. The will when read was found to be in favor of the heirs of Edward Forrester, or, failing that, all was left to a benevolent institution at St. Louis. To Edward Forrester, Jr., the only child of his youngest son, the testator left one dollar "on account of his dissolute and unmanly conduct." The secret of his persistent effort to make Myrtle his wife was explained.

There is little more to tell. They buried the unhappy man in the little valley next day, and just as Old Pegs had laid the last sod upon him, Dave Farrell, followed by a portion of his men, rode into the place. The yell which the trappers gave as they saw Old Pegs and Myrtle alive made the mountains ring again, and Myrtle with a glad cry threw herself into the arms of brave Dave Farrell, the Beaver Captain.

A few days later the party set out for the fort, Old Pegs taking charge of the papers left in his hands by Myrtle's father by means of which her identity was easily established; and she took possession by the will of a property valued at one hundred thousand dollars.

But, prosperity did not spoil her; she still remained the same, and loved her guardian and her trapper lover as of yore. Six months after their return there was a quiet wedding and Dave Farrell with his beautiful wife started for the East. Old Pegs left them in St. Louis, resisting all entreaties to spend his life with the woman who had been a daughter—more than a daughter—to him. He could not leave the mountains yet, but promised that when old age comes on him Myrtle shall smooth his pathway to the grave. So promising he turned his face to the west and was gone.

Whirlwind was killed in an attack upon a trapping camp, some years later, and the men who had followed Edward Forrester in his last expedition scattered in every direction.

Every year Old Pegs comes down to St. Louis, and spends a month in the company of his son and daughter—for he so regards them—and tells the boys wild stories of the plains and mountains where he has lived so long.

THE END.

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